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**Reading**

**Sermon**

SERMON - My Spiritual Journey

You could say, my spiritual journey started at the Church of the Nazarene when I was five years old. My mother had left my father and taken us (my brother and myself) to her parents. A few months later, my mother went to Michigan leaving us with her parents, until she could come back for us.

My father got a divorce and, custody of us kids, which was ironic ,because he would come home drunk and beat on my mother till he was exhausted. But, the court said being with him was best for my brother and me. He had been drafted, so he left us with his mother, and went off to the war. Grandma Kirgan (who now had us in her custody) sent us to the Nazarene Church. I quickly learned the “Jesus Loves me this I know.....” song (you may know the rest of it). I wasn’t sure what that all meant! The lesson that I did understand, was the need to stand very still , during the children’s Christmas Play, and say, Baaaaa, Baaaaa, when prompted.

I never thought about my spiritual path as a grade school kid. A brief stint at the Methodist’s Sunday School made no impression on me. But, I did like the ping pong table in the basement!

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Time passed, I was thirteen when I was sent back to my mother, because my father had been seriously injured in an auto accident. Less than a month later my stepdad , Joe, was killed on the job with Union Electric. He was a lineman!

Joe had no insurance, mother had to sell the house (it wasn’t worth much, but it paid the funeral expenses.) We moved in with her parents, again . Being a devote Catholic, grandma Myers insisted my brothers and I attend Catholic school. It was just before the mid-term exams , when I was dropped into the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Holy Angels School. I had to cram catechism, church history and the lives of the saints in less than two weeks. The catechism made no sense to me and I didn’t care about the church history or the saints. But, I got passing grades!

For the next four years, I endured the watchful eyes of the Notre Dame nuns at the Academy of Notre Dame in Belleville. Those nuns tried to make a believer of me, but I questioned everything they said, and rejected most of it.

I had married, my first husband, a couple years after graduating from

high school . He not only refused to go to church with me, but didn't want me go either. And, he was an abusive drunken gambler! Most weeks on payday, he came home without a paycheck. Thirteen years, and three children later, HE told me, he wanted to move in with his girlfriend. I found the courage to divorce him.

I had a vague idea I should be going to church, or at least sending my children to Sunday School! I felt I was looking for something, but couldn't quite figure out what that was. Then one day, I remembered a quote, St. John of the Cross, we had memorized at Holy Angels. "If a person is seeking God, his Beloved is seeking him much more ... and the desire for God is the preparation for union with Him. Of course, I was looking for God! But, before the divorce, I needed surgery! My mother came up to O'Fallon to take care of me and my three children, even though her husband (at the time) was in a VA hospital dying of cancer. I was in terror of getting a divorce AND , having surgery. How would I support the kids.? I wouldn't be able to work for weeks. Mother helped me!

I hemorrhaged after the surgery, and went back in the hospital. My mother fell down my basement steps (doing laundry) and broke her ankle ( a compound fracture). My stepfather died of cancer a couple weeks later. I was overcome with guilt, it was my fault my mother broke her ankle. My no-good husband had left me, and I thought that was my fault too! I was mentally and physically drained! I felt guilty, fearful and remorseful , I was inconsolable. I felt isolated, absolutely alone. I wasn't so sure "God" was loving and caring . I fought the tears all day, and every night I went to bed, and cried myself to sleep.

And, then, one night, I awoke (or so it seemed) to find myself walking on a forest path, just as the child did in the children's meditation. The trees overhead were very tall. Somehow I knew I was to follow the path, which was covered with finely crushed nut shells. The air around me was fresh, with a gentle breeze that felt comforting. Following the path, I realized the trees were thinning out, and I noticed light coming through the trees. A soft light that also made me feel comforted and at ease. As I walked , the ground gently sloped before me – to a valley below. I stood in the fullness of the light, but could see no sun in the awesome blue sky.

I WAS IN A PLACE OF AWE AND WONDER! The light and the air seemed to be LOVE itself. I felt that peace you've heard about – you know, --" love and peace beyond understanding" All thoughts of fear ,guilt, and sorrow were gone from my mind. I was having a spiritual experience!

Some people might say they don't believe this. But, it was SO! I KNEW the light I saw, and felt on my skin, was the Love of God! I was totally at Peace!

I sat down to take in the marvelously peaceful scene before me. The valley floor was covered with grass, and almost neon yellow flowers. In the distance, across the valley, were tall mountains with huge boulders at their bases. They looked formidable. On my right, a stretch of sand reached as far as I could see, with foamy waves lapping at the beach.

Several bright lights (without any glare) were coming toward me, they dropped low, in front of me, and with a quick blink these lights/spirits transformed into people I knew. Most of them had passed on some time ago. We were all so happy to see each other, I didn't even wonder how this could be! We hugged and we laughed, we danced around, we sang songs of praise, we ran on the soft sandy beach, it only took a second to get there, NOTHING was on my mind except being "there" and being with these spirits. They told me there were many things I needed to DO, not believe, to be fully in the light of God. They took turns teaching me how to live my life and relate to family and friends.

And, their lessons, about the essence of life, of energy, and the Devine, and times of joy went on every night for two weeks. And, each day, during those two weeks, I was feeling better and better! Finally, they said that it was time to go – that I would remember very little of what they had taught me, but I would remember that God cares for me, and I would remember the peace and joy they had shared with me. And then, I would remember the lessons when I heard these truths again from spiritual leaders at home.

I tried to say, I didn't want to leave, couldn't I just stay with them – and they told me I *could* stay, that going back, it would be difficult to live the life they had taught me, it would be like trying to climb the mountains across the valley. It *was* my choice. BUT my children needed me, and I knew I had to go back!

With that realization, I woke, sitting up in bed! The memory of these experiences gave me the comfort, hope and courage which got me through several difficult years that followed. And, I had learned to accept the good and the not-so-good in my life with gratitude!

Some time much later a neighbor gave me a book she had finished reading, Ruth Montgomery's A GIFT OF PROPHECY. I felt a stirring in my inner most self--

I read that we humans have free will and can choose our own destiny. She believed in life after death, and in reincarnation. I had heard this before at the feet of my spirits. This was a spiritual message, God wants us to love one another. As my spirits had taught me, I remembered and I felt I was now taking steps along my spiritual path.

After five years of single life, Terry and I were married. We spent three years north of Chicago, working at Fort Sheridan. Then we were back in St. Louis and lived very close to an Episcopal Church, it seemed to be the place

for us. It didn't take long for me to realize I couldn't handle, even the subtle , sin and salvation message, and even less so the idea of "I am not worthy"

Then another friend gave me a copy of *A COURSE IN MIRACLES*, by *Helen Schucman*. The book was (supposedly) dictated by Jesus to Helen) and is a guide for Christians. That said, there is much there for everyone to learn and follow . As I read, I was continuously feeling, "I've heard this before, of course, this is the truth." "Judge not lest you be judged" was explained as "If you judge the reality of others, you will be unable to avoid judging your own ." The message of the crucifixion –was "Teach only love for that is what you are." The three most important lessons: To have, give all to all; To have peace, teach peace to learn it; and Be vigilant only for God There's a lot more, but that's for another time.

Terry and I spent a few years in a Religious Science Church, which also taught many of the truths I had learned so long ago. "Everything is cause and effect. There is a Universal Intelligence. To learn how to think is to learn how to live. All there really is IS GOD! One of the first things to do, is to Love EveryBody. Love is the grandest healing and drawing power on the earth. Love is the sole impulse for creation. We are to believe in ourselves, because we believe in God – the two of us are One." The Religious Science church believes strongly in the Practice of Spiritual Mind Healing. And, they may be right. But, if I can heal myself with my good thoughts then (I think) my negative, thoughts about someone else could make them sick. So, I couldn't take it all in and believe it, and other teachings like "Man never creates, he discovers and uses." Just didn't ring true for me.

Terry and I checked the newspaper, and came to visit Emerson Chapel, just to see what it was like. That first Sunday, Susan Stafford, talked about the Seven Principles. I was thunderstruck! Here in a nutshell was everything I had learned at the feet of my spirits.: Love my neighbors, respect everyone's worth and dignity, accept others even though they were different, or believed different from me; my goals should be peace, liberty, and justice for all in the world; a democratic process was the UU way. I had to come back to Emerson! Here I can "believe that God is One, God is Love, God is immortal and eternal, that God, the Eternal will shelter and protect me as I come and go." Practicing compassion, gratitude, appreciation, forgiveness and generosity are the way to live my life!

Here was the right path for my Spiritual Journey. I understood what Ralph Waldo Emerson meant when he said, "the soul is the perceiver and revealer of truth." - for my soul was singing with JOY!

My spiritual experience and coming to Emerson had brought me to the same understanding as Plato, when he said, "The ideal most important to him was moral goodness – (because) the good we should spend our lives trying to obtain , even if we always fall short, IS the path to happiness."

So, where do I go now? I want to continue to follow on this path, lined  
with the Seven Principles! Come along with me, be my companions,  
help me, let me help you -- let's sing and dance along the way!  
May the spirit of love be with us!