

Title: The way that you stumble on, is a well-travelled way

Texts: Isaiah 11: 1-10, Matthew 3:1-12

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The way of Christ is a well-trodden road with a diversity of walkers uniquely finding their way - those who have walked before egging on those who are finding their way, providing words/examples that sustain and nurture, walking this way requires constant turning – turning away and turning towards – letting go what we no longer need and embracing that which we are yet to know. Walking this way requires us to walk together.

As I hike familiar paths along the trails in North Vancouver. I have been noticing the ground more. Maybe its to avoid the big puddles!

But I have noticed:

- One's already laid down for me, pathways made of concrete, of asphalt, of dirt, of stone
- One's that are easy to find, that have other people's footprints left in them, and still others that require imagination, relying only on the orange tape tied to the trees.

It has made me ponder about other paths....

- Pathways made of traditions, of the habits of communities, of the patterns of institutions
 - I thought of paths I have made where there were none: ways I have made through imagination, through dreaming, through effort and intention.
 - Paths made of words, paint, paper
 - Paths fashioned of longing
 - Paths fashioned of prayer
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- What does it take to make a way – how it is that we create a passage from one place to another within the landscape of the world or of our own inner terrain?
 - And How we sometimes find a path as much by stumbling as by skill
 - How sometimes in life, we may have to tear apart a road, build it again in a different direction.

The path that we are called to on this particular day in Advent...

“When John the Baptist comes over that wilderness horizon, smelling of camel's hair, his lips dripping with honey and with fire, he is pointing us toward a WAY that we can make only by what we give up, what we shed, what we let go.”

He announces a realm where we turn away from... so that we can turn towards.
A concept expressed in the word: 'repent'

Through the Advent Door: Entering a contemplative Christmas by Jan Richardson

Preparing the WAY for Christ.

It's a way that we may stumble on, but it is a well-travelled way.

Many have gone before us on it, and we are preparing the way for the MANY who will follow behind us.

I wonder what the future looked like for the Isaiah community...

Isaiah's vision in Chapter 11 is one of the most eloquent and imaginative articulations of the yearning for the way of peace for themselves and for their children.

Other than a brief period, one hundred years at most, Israel/Judah didn't have much peace. Isaiah is writing as he looks at a battlefield: the land has been laid waste, trees shattered, Israel's army has been defeated once again.

Isaiah sees a stump on the battlefield, a blunt symbol of defeat and death. It is the end of the monarchy which has been terminated, cut off, gone. But wait, "Look! There is a new shoot...

And a symbol arises that gives hope – and he sees the possibility of peace.

Preaching the Advent Texts by John Buchanan

Isaiah's yearning for the Way of Peace is beautifully painted by Edward Hicks, a nineteenth-century Pennsylvania man, Quaker preacher-artist, in his work called a peaceable kingdom.

He painted the scene over and over - it includes not only predators and prey lying down together in harmony, led by the Christ child, but also in the backdrop the historic treaty made between William Penn and the Lenape American indigenous people, a peaceable agreement that ultimately failed.

It is as if Edward Hicks art (using the images of Isaiah) is inviting us to consider what it looks like to repent. To say no to our animalistic, ignoble instincts that pit us against one another. To abandon our warring natures and to walk the Way of the peace of Christ.

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Walking through BC forests along these paths... like Isaiah, we see many fallen logs. Some dry out and die.

Some become Nursing Log... that like that Stump of Jesse... nurtures other shoots.

A **nurse log** is a fallen tree which, as it decays, provides nutrients, shade, and support to new seedlings.

The nurse log offers: water, moss thickness, leaf litter, and sunlight. Nurse logs even provide disease protection promoting greater seedling survivorship.

It can be for us an image of how one faithful generation provides support for the emerging Christian Way that will nourish the next.

Friends, The emerging Christian Way is...

No longer a belief-centered Christianity but a transformation way – Christians are people committed to a WAY, a path of transformation, as known especially in Jesus.

Marcus Borg, The Emerging Christian Way

It is a way that invites us to integrate our knowledge of nature, science, history, culture, religions, technology with our unique life story as we follow the way of Christ.

Where old ways become new in our living - reaching out to this generation...

I was most intrigued by an article in the Anglican Communion News Service...

St Augustine by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Santa Monica, California is offering something called - The Divine Office (TDO).

For many in the area are working at home alone or going from coffee shop to coffee shop with their laptops.

This community offers space to younger home-based professionals. It also blends monastic-style spirituality while creating co-working spaces.

It's like a day monastery, where people will come to work and worship. Instead of going off to a monastery, having a wonderful retreat and coming home and realising, after a day, a week, all that good feeling and connection is gone, what if we brought monastery-like experiences into our everyday world? What if we wrapped and enveloped our work lives in prayer?

This is one example in the trend of new monasticism...

A movement of Christians to form relational communities (part of and separate from church) that draw from the rich tradition of Christian practices that have long formed disciples in the simple Way of Christ.

These communities form a rule of life in their desire to be transformed (based on the rule of Benedict)..

While they may not live together, they often:

- Intentionally live in close proximity to each other and share economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among them.
- Provide hospitality to strangers.
- Provide support for people living single lives alongside married couples and their children.
- Care for the plot of God's earth given to them along with support of local economies.
- Are committed to peacemaking and conflict resolution within communities
- And are committed to a disciplined contemplative life.

An old way birthing a new form...

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**Singer and songwriter Andrew Peterson sings a song for his son as he leaves home.
And as I have listened to these words, I long for us to forge a creative path that welcomes our children and grandchildren to walk in their way BUT on the old roads.**

The lyrics go...

When I look at you, boy
I can see the road that lies ahead
I can see the love and the sorrow

Bright fields of joy
Dark nights awake in a stormy bed
I want to go with you, but I can't follow

So, keep to the old roads
Keep to the old roads
And you'll find your way

Your first kiss, your first crush
The first time you know you're not enough
The first time there's no one there to hold you

The first time you pack it all up
And drive alone across America
Please remember the words that I told you

Keep to the old roads
Keep to the old roads
And you'll find your way
You'll find your way

If love is what you're looking for
The old roads lead to an open door
And you'll find your way
You'll find your way
