

The Heroes' Journey
Ascension Sunday, May 24 2020
Maple Grove UMC

Rev. Patricia Wagner

Ephesians 1: 15-23

5 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Acts 1: 1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit."

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky?"

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

If you grew up reciting the creed of the church
you know these words:

*He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the father from whence he will come to judge
the quick and the dead.*

I remember pondering that as a child.
how quick did I have to be?
But it is all persons living and dead over whom Christ reigns.

It is awesome and confusing,

In the Lukan account,
the ascension is a moment of revelation:
when we get a glimpse of who Jesus is,
the cosmic Christ,
the revelation of love that
is above all and with all an in all.

In the letter to the Ephesians, we hear another attempt to We hear another attempt to describe it in
that great run-on sentence that is the first chapter of the letter to the church at Ephesus:

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which
he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, **19** and his incomparably
great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength **20** he exerted when he
raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, **21** far above all
rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age
but also in the one to come. **22** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be
head over everything for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in
every way.

Those first disciples, and we are filled with wonder.
what Jesus said to those who were with him before his ascension:

*Your vision is still so limited,
you cannot comprehend what you have seen.
nor time nor place of the divine work in the world*

*This is what you can do, he said.
Prepare for the coming of the Spirit
that is the next step on your journey on the Way.
It is enough for now.*

Jesus journey was one that models that of the hero.
Born into poverty and violence
called from the everyday life of a carpenter's son,
into the unknown

the wilderness,
the water,
to unfathomable healing
incomparable teaching

to conflict and celebration,
to death and resurrection,
and now enfolded into the divine.

*And inviting all his disciples, empowered by the Spirit,
To follow*

We are thinking a lot about heroes lately,
Recognizing them among those we've taken for granted.

The health care workers in hospitals and nursing homes
and EMC vehicles
Who continue to work,
even when their colleagues have fallen sick and died.
living separately from their families to keep
them safe

The person that dons a mask
and stocks your groceries,
brings your mail,
takes away your trash

The ones who live and work in the prisons and jails
who distribute food to those who are hungry
who provide shelter to those who are
sick and homeless
who teach our children
who care for our mental health.

New territory, new duties, new struggles, new learnings

I think of those men and women
whose young faces we saw on the screen a bit ago,

They who were farm boys and small town and city boys
none of whom had ever seen anything like this.
and here they were, by draft or choice
on the front lines
of the unknown.

Something that required everything
they had to give without hope of reward/

And all of us, have been called into the unknown
to face our particular challenges

I heard about a 14 year old boy named Jack,
who developed this terrible syndrome striking some young
people with COVID19
and nearly dying and then remaining weeks in the hospital,
he was so glad that his is a case being studied

around the world; that his journey bore fruit.
*it's been really good to be home, said this hero
and I really want to do more with my life
now that I have it back*

This experience, for some harrowing
for others, a change of pace,
will and must change us, for it to bear the fruit
of the journey/.

Dr. Marina Smirnova says:

*We're all heroes in training.
we can tap into this heroic reservoir
that each of us have.
That sense of resilience, sense of understanding,
sense of togetherness, and sense of community.*

*The beauty of it is that no matter how difficult and how challenging the journeys are—
and we're in many different hero journeys at the same time individually and collectively all together,
they hold that incredible promise to bring forth the gift,
the boon, that actually makes the journey worthwhile
in some deeply human, meaningful way.*

*So each of us gets to look within and connect within
and without and share that sense of humanity
and share the gift not only with ourselves
and with our loved ones but also with the community.*

Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Man with 10,000 Faces*
confirms:

*We have not even to risk the adventure alone;
for the heroes of all time have gone before us;
we have only to follow the thread.*

*And where we had thought to find an abomination,
we shall find God...
where we had thought to travel outward,
we shall come to the center of our own existence;*

we had thought to be alone,

we shall be with all the world.”

where

Jesus said to those who loved him,
and who feared that they were not up to the task.

⋈ *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit
comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.”*

That is our challenge, our commission,
our heroes journey

as the body of Christ
as the People of the Way,
Let's see what gifts it brings.

That is our challenge and our commission as the body of Christ, followers of the Way.

We met with members of the confirmation class
who have loved this time with their families.
Parents realize it to;

Friends
And so we are all called to take on the mantle of the Lord
empowered by his love for us, and for our neighbors

Hero's journey we can think of as a monolith that has three steps—separating from reality as we know it, and certainly that is so relevant for all of us here and now in this time. Then deepening or descending into the unknown, and all of us, individually and collectively, have our share of that experience here and now and that is the journey that essentially will lead to the third step, which is coming back from this journey with a boon.

The beauty of it is that no matter how difficult and how challenging the journeys are—and we're in many different hero journeys at the same time individually and collectively all together, but no matter how difficult and challenging they are—they hold that incredible promise to bring forth the gift, the boon, that actually makes the journey worthwhile in some deeply human, meaningful way. So each of us gets to look within and connect within and without and share that sense of humanity and share the gift not only with ourselves and with our loved ones but also with the community.

Philip Zimbardo. He actually mentioned that we're all heroes in waiting. At this time, it seems to me that we, collectively and individually, have stepped up into new sense of identity. We are no longer heroes in waiting. We're heroes in training. That is definitely something that we share, something that we can remind each other and ourselves of every day and tap into this heroic reservoir that each of us have. That sense of resilience, sense of understanding, sense of togetherness, and sense of community comes and continues to come strongly. We're certainly in this together, within and without

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Joseph Campbell

We have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god ... where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world."

*We are working on coming back
going back to work,
but differently,
with a sense of balance restored
of priorities reordered.
Here, recognizing that just gathering is good
but since we can't gather in our usual numbers
maybe we move from just assembling to connecting,
really connecting with others,
recognizing that is the path of transformation.
Dogs like it.
Children like it.
How to balance the inward and outward life.*

Transformed/Want to bring something back
Jack: Jack it's been really good to be home,
and I really want to do more with my life
now that I have it back

I would also like to share a quote by Joseph Campbell that can be very meaningful for our times. It comes from his text *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. He writes, "We have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god ... where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world"

End:

What is our journey together

Your particular journey

\Those first disciples must have shared with one another their anxieties and fears, their hopes and dreams, their wonder and anticipation as they retraced their steps to Jerusalem that first Ascension Day. Jesus gathered them as a community, taught them as a community, and left from the midst of their little community. The Spirit was promised to them in community. Of course, individuals can and do have experiences of the Spirit, but Jesus makes it clear that it is the Spirit, working in the community, that will spread the good news around the world and bring in the reign of God. That reality has not changed in two millennia. It still takes a community of faith, Spirit-filled, to spread the good news and bring in the reign of God. That is our challenge and our commission as the body of Christ, followers of the Way.

*There is no one but us.
There is no one to send,
Nor a clean hand,
Nor a pure heart
On the face of the earth,
Nor in the earth
But only us,
A generation comforting ourselves
With the notion
That we have come at an awkward time,
That our innocent fathers are all dead –
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From the book *Holy the Firm* by Annie Dillard*

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"I believe in ... Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord ... who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day, he rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven."

At least two churches have closed their doors again after reopening at the end of April/beginning of May. Since the reopenings, several people affiliated with Holy Ghost Church in Texas and Catoosa Baptist Tabernacle in Georgia have tested positive for COVID-19, and one church leader has passed away in what might have been a virus-related death.

Who are the heroes

It was always the everyday soldier,
the one who offered his or her life

Jack it's been really good to be home,
and I really do more with my life
now that I have it back

and I just want to do more with more with my life
now that I have it back.

holding his captain america

14 year old Jack

Car accident

Since I survived I want to do more with my life.

Jesus Ascension

Returning home, in a way.
a full circle
prefiguring our own.

A journey

Hero's journey in which one moves through call
to response to a call to action
to challenge
to death
to resurrection.
to returning to bring something powerful back to us.

Hero's journey

which have parallels throughout our literature

With a departure into a new situation
withdrawal from family or community for preparation,
we may struggle with the call, feel it is forced upon us.
Then the initiation

the trials, the quest
suffering and death may come,

then the return
marked by resurrecion/rebirth
asension
and freedom,
changed and bringing something good to those on has left.

Thank you, Drake, for beginning in inviting us into a sense of beauty that exists within and without.

Tapping into this is just such a gift. As you mentioned, we have an opportunity as ministers in crisis. There is certainly danger and opportunity that are tied together in a paradoxical way that each of us gets to explore throughout our lifetimes, and this time is no different. What I'd like to offer is an opportunity to not only cope but actually use this time for glances within, looking at the heart but also connecting with others, taking a look at reframing our experience as one of individual and also collective hero's journey. This is something that Joseph Campbell talked about decades ago and that continues to be very relevant for all of us.

Hero's journey we can think of as a monolith that has three steps—separating from reality as we know it, and certainly that is so relevant for all of us here and now in this time. Then deepening or descending into the unknown, and all of us, individually and collectively, have our share of that experience here and now and that is the journey that essentially will lead to the third step, which is coming back from this journey with a boon.

The beauty of it is that no matter how difficult and how challenging the journeys are—and we're in many different hero journeys at the same time individually and collectively all together, but no matter how difficult and challenging they are—they hold that incredible promise to bring forth the gift, the boon, that actually makes the journey worthwhile in some deeply human, meaningful way. So each of us gets to look within and connect within and without and share that sense of humanity and share the gift not only with ourselves and with our loved ones but also with the community.

For Joseph Campbell the hero journey was incomplete until that boon was a render to the community in a way that it stretches the community—not only gives what the community needs but actually goes beyond meeting the need. So in our day and time, reframing our journeys as heroic would be very helpful.

Also, in this time, what comes to my mind is the work and accommodations that have been shared by Philip Zimbardo. He actually mentioned that we're all heroes in waiting. At this time, it seems to me that we, collectively and individually, have stepped up into new sense of identity. We are no longer heroes in waiting. We're heroes in training. That is definitely is something that we share, something that we can remind each other and ourselves of every day and tap into this heroic reservoir that each of us have. That sense of resilience, sense of understanding, sense of togetherness, and sense of community comes and continues to come strongly. We're certainly in this together, within and without.

I would also like to share a quote by Joseph Campbell that can be very meaningful for our times. It comes from his text *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. He writes, "We have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god ... where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world."

Each of us and each individual have an opportunity to tap into that heroic potential. And here we are, in the world that is made of out 7.7 billion heroes no longer in waiting but really heroes in the making. So let it lead us to the best of boons all together. Each day is a new opportunity to remember who we are. *Marina Smirnova, Ph.D., Saybrook University, webcaset - "Unboundl Saybrook Insights, March 25,2020.* Well, dear Theophilus, God-lovers all, the story continues

Dr. Long: Marina, that was beautiful. Tapping into our beauty and the surroundings around us and into our hero's potential—what a gorgeous, gorgeous way of bringing us and centering us as a community.

The good news for those left standing on that Judean hillside is that Jesus not only comes from God, he returns to God. This is the true scope of movement for followers of the Way—we come from God, we return to God. The challenge in the meantime is to keep our lives centered on God, rooted and grounded in God, allowing God to be the one in whom we "live and move and have our being" ([Acts 17:28](#)), here and now, on this earth.

"Is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ([v. 6](#)). They continue to show shortsightedness; they cannot yet envision the big picture. "Your vision is too small. You are not ready for, nor do you need to know, the details of how God is operating here. You need to get yourselves ready for the coming of the Spirit that will be the next leg of your journey on the Way. It is enough for now. It is all you can handle."

How are we hamstrung by our inability to see beyond the conventional into the miraculous promises that are still given to us today as followers of the Way? What would it take for us, as individuals and as communities of faith, to travel this thoroughfare that leads from God to God?

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community. The Spirit was promised to them in community. Of course, individuals can and do have experiences of the Spirit, but Jesus makes it clear that it is the Spirit, working in the community, that will spread the good news around the world and bring in the reign of God. That reality has not changed in two millennia. It still takes a community of faith, Spirit-filled, to spread the good news and bring in the reign of God. That is our challenge and our commission as the body of Christ, followers of the Way.

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A,
Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.

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Nor a pure heart
On the face of the earth,
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But only us,
A generation comforting ourselves
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"I believe in ... Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord ... who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day, he rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven." In the Lukan account, the ascension is the revelatory moment beyond which the disciples are never the same.

To our twenty-first-century minds, it may be tempting to dismiss the record of one ascending into the abyss of space, as if God somehow dwells "out there" beyond the vast astronomical expanse. However, lest we forget, even the earliest disciples were trapped in their own understanding of time, space, and the kingdom of God. In [Acts 1:3](#), Jesus spends forty days teaching them about the reign of God, yet they still misunderstand. Only after the ascension and their peculiar experience with the absent and yet ever-present Lord are their conceptions of time and space transformed. Certainly, the "restoration of Israel" remains a viable hope, but the center of Jesus' rule shifts from Jerusalem to the heavenly realms where he takes his place at the right hand of the Father. From such transcendence Jesus reigns ([Eph. 4:10](#)), and God's kingdom expands beyond the limitations of all earthly kings and kingdoms, revealing the man from Nazareth as the Lord, the Lord who is one. [3]

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.

Returning home—coming full circle—is my Ascension
Promote health. Save lives. Serve the vulnerable. Visit who.int
Let me share my story of “ascension.” I have shared this in a previous reflection, but let me reflect on it again from the perspective of the ascension. I hope this will help you reflect on your own journey and story.

Sense of mission

My own sense of mission began in 1980. For years I struggled with the burden of coming from a broken, dysfunctional family. It was when I started teaching that I realized the purpose of all this. Among senior high school students, around five to eight students in a class of 42 or so would be somewhat burdened by the same struggle.

Then I understood how my “woundedness” would serve as source of my mission, to help young people heal their similar wound and discover their own mission. It was then I made the offering and commitment to teaching.

In discovering this mission I also discovered then and more so through the years who I am.

For a few years—some of the happiest in my life—I enjoyed a peaceful, joyful life of teaching. I saw myself being able to do this for the rest of my life. At one point, it was even clear to me that my future partner and family will have to embrace this mission of teaching and the life that comes with it.

At the same time, the call to journey, the call to priesthood was a nagging question. When I first gave in to the call and went through the application process, half-heartedly, I must confess, the Jesuits told me they needed to know me more before accepting me. It was one of the happiest rejections I had, joyful that I could continue to teach.

Then almost two years later, as I was turning 24, I decided I had to put it to rest. Try it one more time. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, at least there would be no what-ifs later on.

I left home; not so much the physical home, but the home of my heart and soul—teaching. I spent years in formation and studies pursuing what I thought might be my calling. I still had hoped and had expressed the desire that I would go back to teaching as my apostolate or work. But journeys are not that simple.

For years I was obedient to the call of the journey. I studied to be an administrator and convinced myself that it was the closest I would get to teaching. Good enough for me! I loved my years as principal and—I am discovering more and more now—the students, teachers, and parents who believed in the kind of school and education I was advocating also loved our years together.

Yet the journey took a twist. I was taken out of what was the closest I could get to teaching. I said “yes” with the faith and conviction that my moving to the job I was asked to do was good for the school and its mission. How naive of me then.

I rolled up my sleeves and buckled down to work, setting a timeframe, targets, deliverables. Eventually the deadlines became “moving-targets” as people sat on decisions and we missed deadlines. We adjusted. The goal and the mission were too important to be petty.

As all this was going on, I continued to discern and struggle; it was between doing something important and doing something that was at the core of my identity and mission. The struggle, the tension was between two goods in search of what would be the greater good. What is God's will?

Transformation

There were three moments of transformation in my journey. The 2003 Holy Week retreat helped me reclaim my story and gave me a renewed integration. My Christmas 2004 recollection put closure to my final job at Ateneo; standing before God in the silence of solitude and prayer I was honestly able to say to him, “Lord, you know I did my best doing this job; time for me to go and move on—or move back—to what is closest to my heart and soul.” These led me closer to home.

The third moment was in the morning of May 7, 2005, a Saturday, my late father’s birthday. I was with my spiritual director, the late Fr. Benny Calpotura, SJ, and he was “grilling” me about my desire to work with teachers from the public schools. Then midway through the conversation he asked, “What good would your teacher formation work do considering how overwhelming the problems are in the public school system?”

Very calmly I responded, “Father, I thought about that and it is clear to me that if I form even just one good teacher every year for the next 25 years of my active life, I will be doing God’s mission for me.”

He gave me his distinct Fr. Benny stare and said, “Go! The movements are very clear. God wants you to do this work. Go!”

To this day I clearly remember the feeling at that moment. I felt warmth in my body, a sense of relief and a sense of sadness, as if a part of me had died. In this seeming paradoxical state I felt a very quiet, simple yet deep sense of freedom. Relief and freedom because I knew that this is indeed God’s call I am pursuing. Sadness because one could not simply walk away from a major part of my life (close to 40 years)—I studied at Ateneo for 16 years, starting 1964; worked there as a high school teacher for three years; lived there from 1985-2005, save for years that I worked at Ateneo de Zamboanga and studied at Fordham University and Gonzaga University. It was a home that I loved dearly. But it was time to leave and continue my journey.

Home

July 2005 I was granted a leave of absence and a year later I formally asked to be dismissed from the Society of Jesus; September 2006 my decree of dismissal was issued, which I signed Sept. 11, 2006.

I returned “home” and again pursued what I had discerned was my mission—to work as a teacher, work with public school teachers. It was not easy, but sometimes—often, perhaps—one had to suffer, to sacrifice in the journey to pursue one’s dream and to follow God’s call.

Returning home—coming full circle—was my ascension. To teaching I returned with the dream that creating more caring environments in schools, our public schools, is a way of making our world a bit better, bringing it closer to “the new heavens and the new earth.”

Do we also become masters of two worlds? I don’t know. But we do become at peace with two worlds, our imperfect temporal world and, infused with meaning and a sense of mission, it lies at the threshold of eternity. This is the guarantee of the Lord’s Ascension—“What we have done will not be lost to all eternity. Everything ripens and bears fruit in its own hour.”—“The Remembering Garden,” by Roseanne Sanders

Our journeys, no matter how difficult and challenging they are—they hold that incredible promise to bring forth the gift, the boon, that actually makes the journey worthwhile in some deeply human, meaningful way. Dr. Marina Smirnova, Ph.D.

How would you describe the journey of this pandemic in your life. What was most challenging? Do you see any gifts - wisdom, learnings - coming forth?

Are there examples of heroism that you've witnessed or heard about that are particularly stirring to you? Why do you think they make such an impression? What does it call forth in you?

How does this hero's journey reflect that of the Christ. How would you hope yours will?