Labyrinths – walking the desert – walking on water

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Pentecost+10A – Mt 14 22-36 Peter walks on water to Jesus, Gen 37 1-14, 12-28 Joseph to Egypt

Let's look again for a moment at the prayer of the day.

> Mighty God and ruler of all creation, give new strength to our faith, that we may recognise your presence even when all hope seems lost. Help us to face all trials with serenity as we walk with Christ through the stormy seas of life and come at the last to your eternal peace.

I'd like to bring some how questions to this prayer. *How do I take hold of the new strength God gives my faith; … how will I know God's there when things look hopeless, … how can I learn to face hard times serenely, … and when I find eternal peace, how will I settle into it?* It's a big prayer; it's inspired by today's readings about Joseph and Peter. We saw each of them today as they set off on hopeless looking journeys through the stormy seas of life – Peter quite literally.

The prayer set for today asks that our life's journeys might also take us to a place of strong faith – take us to where we are conscious of God's presence – take us to where we might face our trials with serenity – take us to a place of peace. But how? How is this possible? Is there a tried and trusty way?

Actually, yes. Let me tell you a story of one person who discovered a way. It started for a friend who, like so many today, suddenly and unexpectedly lost her job. It was very hard; it was spiritually crushing. Did anyone want her; would anyone? Who was she without a job? She just had to go, but

with no idea where. It was totally new for her to be out of control like this. She had nowhere to go.

Someone invited her to try an ancient form of prayer – to walk a labyrinth. It was a way of praying she hadn't tried before. But she decided to try it.
[There's a difference between a labyrinth and a maze. As you see in the pictures below, the labyrinth (on the left) has no dead ends, but the maze (on the right) has them. So a maze is a puzzle set up with false paths to trick us. But a labyrinth has a path which we can trust. Walking a labyrinth is a journey of prayer – a metaphor for walking our journey of life towards God – the centre.]

Standing at the entrance to the labyrinth, she was about to look it over and get an idea of its layout; that's what she'd normally have done – plan ahead. But something told her not to do that this time. So she set off, looking only at the path right at her feet. She took a first step, then another, and slowly went on.

She simply put one foot in front of the other. She had trouble keeping her balance; she was stressed. But gradually, she learnt to trust that the path would come to meet her. She let go of the worry; she stopped trying to be in control.

By the time she'd reached the centre – and she has no idea how long it took – she'd received a gift from the labyrinth. It was this; she knew by then that whatever her direction, whatever her feelings, the path would come to meet her. And more; *regardless of the number of turnings or the amount of*

time she took, that path would lead her unerringly to the centre.

What a lesson about prayer! – that prayer is not about duty and planning, not determined by remorse or worry for the past. Rather, it's God's way of coming to us; of calling to us – to help us leave those burdens behind, outside, as one step at a time, we wend our way to the centre.

Her journey back out of the labyrinth was a very different experience from the inward journey. She'd entered the labyrinth carrying a heavy load of pain and worry. But by the time she'd reached the centre, she'd learned to let it go, and in return, she'd received a special gift for the outward journey. The gift was her new understanding that the path would always come to meet her, and regardless of all the changes in direction, it would lead her to the centre. Today's readings speak of journeys like this one – journeys whose travellers take the next step on a path which will come to meet them. Joseph sets out to find his brothers not knowing that it's the start of a journey which will take him bound as a slave to Egypt. Ultimately his journey will see him rescue his family from famine. Years later, his descendants will walk a labyrinth too; one that we call the Exodus.

Then there's Peter; he steps out of his boat to walk on the water towards Jesus. A few faltering steps and he's overcome by fear. He begins to sink and cries out to be saved. Jesus – the Way – comes and takes hold of him. It's his whole life-story glimpsed in a moment.
Throughout this week, let's pray the prayer of the day. Let's wonder – could the frightening how questions to be answered by a wordless prayer as uncluttered as walking a labyrinth, and seeing what comes to meet us; or who? Amen

> **Step by Step** by Shirley A. Serviss
> We enter the labyrinth – this sacred space –
> not knowing our way, not knowing how the day

will unfold, what the outcome may be.
In the labyrinth we have nothing to fear;
the path will become clear as we take one step
after the other. All we need do is keep on going.
All we need ever do is continue to take
the next step to see where it takes us.

We are each on our own journey,
can take our own time, move at our own pace.
The only race we're in is the human one.
We are kin to all who walk this way,
searching for guidance in place of uncertainty,
hope in place of despair. Namaste-
our spirits greet each other as we meet on the path.

In the labyrinth, we move in circles, but are not lost.
We find our way through what appears to be a maze,
learning patience as it twists and turns, seemingly
taking too long, taking us further from our goal,
before it doubles back around, finally bringing us
to a place where all becomes clear.

Now we prepare to re-enter: our work, our world,
our lives. We make progress, only to regress –
no straight road to follow. We take comfort in the walking:
the meditative meandering of the labyrinth,
the guidance of the lines, the reassurance
we will find our way through the challenges we face
as we continue to place one foot in front of the other.
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For you, deep stillness by Julie Perrin
For you, deep stillness of the silent inland
for you, deep blue of the desert skies
for you, flame red of the rocks and stones,
for you, sweet water from hidden springs.
From the edges seek the heartlands

and when you’re burnt by the journey
may the cool winds of the hovering spirit
soothe and replenish you
in the name of Christ, in the name of Christ.