

The Way We Walk: Musings on the Spiritual Practices of Lutherans

I've been interested in spirituality for a long time. I'm a spiritual director; I lead spiritual retreats; I've gone on spiritual pilgrimages; I have a library of spiritual books. But when asked by Bishop Shelley to write a series of articles on Spiritual Practices (also called Spiritual Disciplines), I felt it was an invitation to look at this topic like it was new, and to look at it particularly for Lutherans. What do we do traditionally and what new is leaking into our practices? What practices have we neglected or avoided in the wider Christian tradition?

I've always relied on the root word of spirit to define spirituality for me: in the Greek, it's *pneuma*, in the Hebrew, *ruah*, in the Latin, *spiritus*. All of these meaning in some form or other movement of that which is invisible—wind, breath, air, soul. Once I was watching a bull fight in a stadium in Madrid, sitting in a crushing mass of people, when a white dove flew into the center of the bull ring. The crowd of thousands hushed, so silent I was stunned. And then the dove flew up in a spiral into the blue evening sky and as if in one voice, the crowd began shouting, "Spiritus, spiritus!" in deep awe. It was that movement of the dove, that brought form to the invisible movement of Spirit for me in that unforgettable moment. (I know, a strange place to see the Spirit at a bull fight.) For me, spirituality is how God's Spirit moves in each person's life and in the life of the congregation.

But I was searching for new ways of thinking about spirituality as I began this writing, and decided to go where most in our culture search for information—Wikipedia. I was intrigued by Kees Waaijman's definition: 'a process of re-formation which "aims to recover the original shape of man, the image of God."'

Ah, Reformation! Now there's something for Lutherans! To recover the original shape of man—the shape of God. Beautiful. Using this idea of spiritual practices as a way of re-forming ourselves into the shape of God, I want to explore a few practices that are familiar and some that may not be. And I will be asking Lutherans what spiritual practices have 're-formed' them. So expect a few stories too. And contact me if you have a spiritual practice you'd like to share for this series: mwakeland@gmail.com.

Dorothy Bass in her book, *Practicing Our Faith*, suggests that as we explore which spiritual practices to follow in our walk, we could consider: "Why is it important to the flourishing of human life? Does the practice in any way hurt or oppress? How does the practice enable us to participate in the activity of God's Spirit in the world? How have wider communities adopted it? Is it crystallized in worship?"

She and also Richard Foster who has written the time-honored, *Celebration of Spiritual Disciplines* warn of a spiritual discipline becoming a law, not a freedom. Both suggest it takes awareness so that whatever we practice moves us closer to God, not to strengthening our own ego. Our spiritual practices are those that are filled with meaning and that take us deeper into the love of God and neighbor.

Here's a few of the upcoming topics: *Giving away Money As a Way to Freedom*; *Saying Yes and Saying No*; *Walking Slowly*. Pr. Marcia Wakeland; mwakeland@gmail.com