

The Spiritual Practice of Walking Slowly

As a reminder, the working definition of a spiritual practice that I'm using for this series is "a process of re-formation which aims to recover the original shape of the human-- the image of God." I repeat it here because this definition keeps blowing me away.

*When I look back on spiritual practices that have truly re-formed me and let me glimpse that miracle of being the 'image of God', I have to include this strange practice: **Walking Slowly.***

It's a metaphor in many ways, but when I first learned it, it was quite literal. I got out of my car with my hands full, my mind on the next meeting I was running to and the list of things I had yet to do that day, when I dropped my keys on the ground. I bent to pick them up and a strange thing happened.

Maybe it was the sacred ground I was on at the Holy Spirit Retreat Center up on O'Malley. Or maybe it was just pure divine intervention. But suddenly, I *noticed* the rocks where my keys had dropped. Now they weren't anything particularly spectacular—the usual D-1 gravel used for driveways, small, kind of sharp and a mixture of white and gray. But in that moment, they seemed quite beautiful and extraordinary to me. And I paused to see them, suddenly aware of how very old they were; suddenly knowing they came from the time of creation of this planet. Suddenly they were akin to me, no less the idea of God than I.

When I straightened up, I heard a little voice inside say, "Walk slowly." And that was my spiritual practice for a long time--not perfectly, not every time, but more and more often, like any spiritual practice, I would notice myself rushing, stop, take a breath and say to myself, "Walk slowly."

Not long after that, when I was still just beginning, I was outside the Alaska Native Medical Center entrance when I saw a Native elder, walking toward the door too. It was a bright sunny day and the sidewalk was rimmed with flowers. The Elder stopped and bent down from the waist, holding the palm of his hand just above the flowers for a few minutes. Then he stood up, saw me watching him, and said, "I just like to feel the energy of those pansies." Then he laughed hard, I smiled and I knew he had been walking slowly a long while.

Walking slowly is perhaps another way of thinking of the old adage, "Stop and smell the roses." Or the more current wisdom saying, "Be present to the Moment." Yet Walking Slowly has its own grace. It is the way of the pilgrim, as body, mind and spirit coalesce because they've been given time and space and intention.

The re-forming is no less than changing the shape of our day where *our* agenda takes precedence in the forming of a day to one where the walk with God becomes central. A gentle reminder every day of how close Love travels with us. And how, yes, we are that image of God's love.

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No spiritual discipline is the right invitation for every person. But if you are one who already knows you are traveling too fast, I invite you to try the spiritual practice of Walking Slowly. Just once, get the bags of groceries out of the car and walk slowly into the house. Take time to walk slowly into your workplace, especially if you are late. Notice when you are rushing and try saying, "Walk slowly," thinking of it as God's invitation to get in touch.

If you'd like to tell me what your experience is, you can reach me at mwakeland@gmail.com. I'd love to hear it.