

Holy Ground

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A quarterly reflection on
the contemplative life



BARBIE AND DISOREINTATION



Overheard in upstairs hall landing:

You be Ken. I'll be the wife. Let's say we have three children, and one is an orphan. The wife's name is Samantha Parkington, no let's make that Sonora. Now the ball is tomorrow. Say it's next morning and this is a very nice dress she always wears. Pretend the prince comes.

"Hello, Prince." (in sultry voice)

"Hello Princess. (in husky male voice) I have dreamed of glory!"

Pretend they are Circus Acrobats, and they do tricks on this rope. Barbie likes to wear this pink outfit for their act, or should she wear one of her bikinis?

Now lower them down over the staircase handrail (whispered).

Wait. Mom will get mad. She's got somebody down there.

No, she won't. She'll never see. Here they come the Great Zambinis!

(Muffled snickers and giggles.)



As we celebrate thirty-five years of publishing *Holy Ground*, we offer some excerpts from a 1992 issue, alongside some new adventures.

The summer began with a trained dog act held on the front porch featuring 12-year-old Sarah. Her main tricks were sitting, shaking hands, jumping over a stick and laying down (after her mistresses sat on her.) Though the tricks were few, Sarah's costumes were not. For her first act she wore a red net tutu with red bows on her ears. She moved into the second trick in a yellow leotard, followed by an orange and purple sequined number, which showed off her fetching haunches for the finale.

Then there were the elegant Victorian tea party and a puppet show with puppets made of Styrofoam balls stuck on popsicle sticks. For several days the backyard tree house became a ship in search of pirates and treasure. One day they were rainforest dwellers, wearing headwraps and sarongs and dragging out all the stuffed animals. Bike rides, swimming, drawing class, and fights over the hammock rounded out our days.

When they didn't know what else to

do, there was always playing Barbies. Each day when a playmate went home, when tempers flared, when someone wouldn't share, or a game just came to its natural conclusion – there would come that sudden, brutal question: What next? And they would hunt me up and announce with great anguish, "Mom, we are so bored. There is nothing to do!"

I would list several insulting things like practicing the piano, reading a book, or helping to fold the laundry, which would only serve to increase the pitch and volume of their whining. Pretty soon they had settled down and were contentedly playing with Ken and Barbie.

I began to understand how this play was soothing and comforting for them. Living in a world where adults controlled much of their lives, Ken and Barbie were controlled by my daughters. Here was a place to act out their frustrations and imaginations. Playing Barbies became a transitional activity, a way to shift gears and move through that anxious hole of what-shall-we-do-we-do now?

Today many of us turn to our phones and other screens in moments of



waiting and uncertainty. There we may fill the void and soothe ourselves playing games, shopping and scrolling our social media feeds.



What happens when you have just put on the best puppet show in the whole world and everyone has gone home? What happens when your eyes are full of light, when your mind has shared the mind of God, when your heart breaks with compassion for the suffering of our planet? What happens after enlightenment, after Christ appears and you fall on your face in the dirt?

Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took me by the hand and led me to Damascus.

Acts 22:11

“Mom, I don’t get it. I just don’t get it,” ten-year-old Diana says, like some

startled creature suddenly yanked from its natural element and plunked down in a foreign place. “Sometimes, I think I must be dreaming all this or that maybe I am just a little mouse in a corner somewhere watching myself.” Yes, who are we anyway? The world is a whole lot wilder and more incomprehensible than any of us can imagine.

Perhaps you saw the Barbie movie. I did and enjoyed it. Barbie and Taylor Swift have lifted the hearts of many people this summer. We take ourselves so seriously. It is a relief to play, to pretend, laugh and wear pink with a crowd of other folks, who are worn down and exhausted from constantly Breaking Bad News.

Like Barbie, Ken and their friends in the movie, we are finding out, that who we thought we were, may not be who we were, and that who we are becoming is still unknown and winking at us over the horizon. This is the beginning of transformation, and it is disorienting.

Disorientation may be terrifying. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(Hebrews 10:31)



Yet we need not be alarmed. Losing control and being disoriented are a natural part of the journey of deepening maturity and faith.

LOST IN THE CORNFIELDS

At the beginning of the retreat, we went around the circle of 25 people each answering the question: How would you describe yourself as you begin this retreat. Many of the group said they were burned out and tired. That fit for me too, but “Disoriented” was my answer.

On the way to the week-long Silent Directed Retreat, I got lost in a vast maze of cornfields in Nebraska. I drove for miles down narrow, rough county roads alongside fields, stretching as far as I could see in all directions. My GPS kept leading me off the highways onto these roads.

Why? I kept checking the map. I should be on a highway! This is going nowhere!

I passed a sprawling Monsanto plant, then a huge feedlot, a CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation), and a little girl sitting in the back of a pickup, who waved at me. I saw only a few homes. Was my GPS even able to catch a signal out here in

these massive fields? Finally, I passed an old, boarded up church with a sign, *Auction*, nailed to the door. Just then a man emerged from a field, where I had parked my car to try once again to figure out where on earth I was. Relieved to see a human being, I got out and told the fellow I was lost. He concurred, nodding at my Iowa license plate. He told me that to reach the retreat center I needed to stay on this road until I came to the highway and then turn right. There, I would be able to see the entrance to the Monastery and Retreat Center high on a hill. I was sure I was lost and felt so helpless.

All I needed to do was stay on the road I was on.

Biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann writes about how orientation, disorientation and a surprising new orientation are fundamental movements in our lives of faith. “This move [from orientation to disorientation] is experienced as a changed circumstance, but it is much more a personal awareness and acknowledgement of the changed circumstance. It may be an abrupt or slow dawning acknowledgement. It constitutes a dismantling of the old known world and relinquishment of safe, reliable



confidence in God's good creation. This movement includes a rush of negatives, including rage, resentment, guilt, shame, isolation, despair, hatred, and hostility." - Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*.

Does this sound familiar? We are living in an extended period of disorientation on personal, community, national and global levels. People, fleeing for their lives from famine, war, and drug cartels, form a great tide of disoriented souls needing support and help in getting their bearings. Meanwhile, those whose homes have been lost in fires, floods, and wind, also feel a deep inner chaos and uncertainty. Educators sort the banned books from the approved books and revise their class plans. Voters wonder if their vote will count. More and more people rely on power and force to impose their will on others.

What do people really need spiritually? What do you really need? Where and how do you get these needs met? I have spent 40 years listening to people talk about their relationship to God. To put it simply, I would say people want to see Jesus. That is, they want to see and feel and know the absorbing, nurturing, healing presence of the Risen Christ

in their lives. They want to live in the boundless joy and freedom of the Love of the Holy One.

Sometimes what we need is someone with hope and faith to sit with us in our disorientation and the range of feelings we experience. Even better we need a community who knows as Jesus said, "Cut off from him they can do nothing," and will listen and walk with us in our shared disorientation.

Disorientation is liminal space. It makes pilgrims out of us, walking under arduous conditions toward some shrine or sacred site for healing and to touch the hem of God in some palpable way. Here we stand on the threshold, anxiously waiting in that long corridor between now and what will be. Here in this thin place the curtain of our ego's version of reality may lift a bit and we glimpse the glory of the Realm of God.

It is when we are dismayed and have little or no idea about what to do or how to respond that we find ourselves in thin places and ripe for seeing things we never saw before. We fail to see that our own powerlessness, which we try so hard to hide, is actually the door that opens us to grace.



A recent Public Religious Research Institute study reports that 57% of Americans say they seldom or never attend religious services. Pilgrimage, meanwhile, is more popular than ever. In 2014 the United Nations released a study finding that of every three tourists worldwide, one is a pilgrim, a total of 330 million people.

Here is where faith is deepened – at the very places where we have nothing left to rely on, but the tattered white flag of faith.

*Pray the prayer that is the essence
of every ritual. God, I have no
hope.
I am torn the shreds. You are my
first,
my last, my only refuge.
Do not do daily prayers like a bird
pecking its head up and down.
Prayer is an egg,
Hatch out the total
helplessness inside. - Rumi*

God does not photograph well, and prayer does not lend itself to ledger books. The alpine climber swings over the crevasse in solitary daring and plants his flag on the summit with only the wind and the glacier for his witness.

He returns, sunburned, breathless, exhilarated, “I saw,” he says, “I saw it all.”

“I am who I am,” says God. The Holy One knows the divine self, not in relation to anything else. I shudder to know myself in that bold barren way. “I am...” I say, and hunt over and over for something, the right thing, anything to drive my stake in, a small crack where I can dig in my fingers and dangle over the universe by virtue of my own strength.

Instead, I am dangled with Ken and Barbie Zambini. Attached by the thin string of my unique being to the Holy Child, I circle joyfully in the brightness of that light.

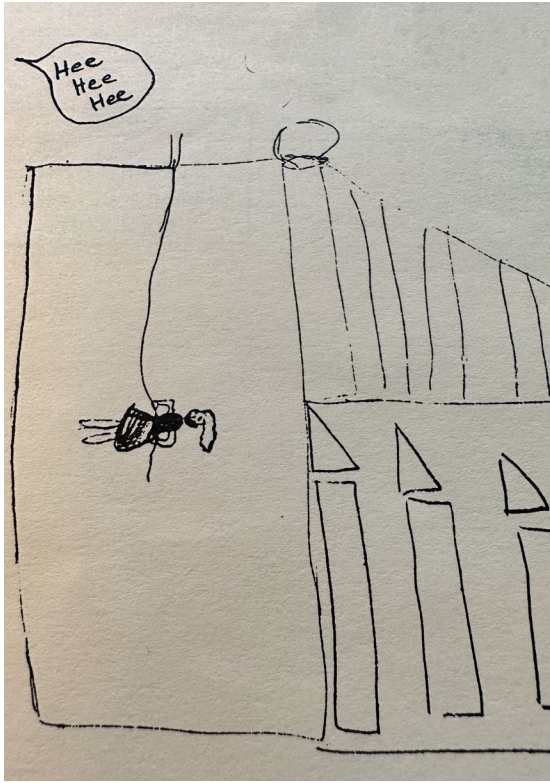
All we need to do is to trust the road we’re on. May we each be ever turning in the brightness of that light, while somebody upstairs gets the giggles.

Loretta F Ross



You need not leave your room.
Remain sitting at your table and
listen. You need not even listen.
Simply wait. You need not even wait.
Just learn to become quiet and still and
solitary. The world will freely offer itself
to you to be unmasked. It has no choice. It
will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

- Franz Kafka



THE Praying Life

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Thank You!

Holy Ground readers are amazing. Thank you
for your generous support of this Wayside
Fruit Stand. The Sanctuary and its programs
are open to serve a wide range of people. And
we have a great assortment of the fruits of the
Spirit ready for you.

What the Sanctuary Means to Me

*I hope you had a rich and meaningful Easter. I'm
always so glad when Holy Ground arrives, because
I know it will prompt me to slow down, sit, and
reflect. A real blessing.*

- L Scobey

*This morning I read your work, "When Sight
Returns," in Give Us This Day. Mercy! How your
words moved me; my spirit quickened! Every time I
read one of your writings I am moved.*

- D. O'Quinn

**Do you have a story or experience over the past
35-40 years related to the Sanctuary ministry? If so
we would love to hear from you and share it with
others.**



It seems odd to say so, but too much religion is a bad thing. We can't get too much of God, can't get too much faith and obedience, can't get too much love. But religion – the well-intentioned efforts we make to “get it together for God” – can very well get in the way of what God is doing for us.

The main and central action is everywhere and always what God has done, is doing, and will do for us. Jesus is the revelation of that action. ... Our part in the action is the act of faith. But more often than not we become impatiently self-important along the way and decide to improve matters with our two cents' worth. We become fussily religious or anxiously religious. We get in the way.

Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, p. 2180



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...the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2-3

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