

POST-SABBATICAL CELEBRATION ~ LINCOLN PARK

STORY SHARING: A DIM SUM APPROACH

HOW CAN YOU SUMMARIZE a 4 month Sabbatical Odyssey that took you through 7 Western States and 7 European countries?

YOU CAN'T.

But what you CAN DO is provide a GLIMPSE...a little TASTE...of a SELECT FEW of those places, experiences, and encounters you had along the way.

AND THAT'S WHAT I AIM TO DO THIS MORNING.

How many of you are familiar with Chinese DIM SUM?

The words DIM SUM mean, literally, "TOUCH THE HEART."

DIM SUM is an approach to Chinese cuisine that involves serving small portions of special dishes designed to TOUCH THE HEART rather than fill the stomach.

MY APPROACH TO THE STORIES I'LL BE SHARING TODAY IS SIMILAR:

The goal is not to serve up FIVE ENTREES and send you away STUFFED!

But rather, to offer SMALL SAMPLES from among the many experiences of our Sabbatical, FOCUSING on ones that TOUCHED OUR HEARTS; and thereby, perhaps, WHETTING YOUR APPETITE FOR MORE.

It's time to introduce the song that we'll be using, like a thread, to bind our stories together.

TEACH: COME WALK WITH US THE JOURNEY IS LONG.

READING 1: Job:4-7, 31-33

A reading from Job.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone

⁷when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion?

³²Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,

or can you guide the Bear with its children?

Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?

Can you establish their rule on the earth?

L Holy wisdom. Holy word.

C **Thanks be to God.**

VIGNETTE 1: CANYON COUNTRY

Our visit to THE NATIONAL PARKS OF UTAH & the GRAND CANYON was SPECTACULAR. As we feasted our eyes on jaw-dropping views of Earth’s greatest natural sculptures—Arches, Canyonland, Bryce Canyon, Zion, the Grand Canyon—we often found ourselves speechless yet thirsting for more.

Moving through these landscapes was an exercise in AWE & HUMILITY.

Armed with biographies of John Wesley Powell—the first non-Native to take the measure of this country—I was GOB-SMACKED at every turn by the SHEER IMMENSITY AND MYSTERY OF THESE LANDSCAPES...

AND—by comparison—with the UTTER BREVITY of the HUMAN STORY when measured against it all.

As it happened, our second night at BRYCE CANYON was the night we’d arranged to go STAR GAZING with a group called THE DARK RANGERS.

Not only does BRYCE CANYON boast the world’s greatest concentration of rock pillars known as HOODOOS, it’s also one of the best places in the country for STAR GAZING. And our itinerary had us visiting during the dark phase of the moon – PERFECT!

With an elevation of over 8,000, we knew it would be COLD at BRYCE the 3rd week of April, but we didn't know we'd wake up to a FRIGID 18 DEGREES the morning of our DARK SKY adventure!

But we'd come prepared—with ski pants and jackets, boots, hats and gloves. So as the sun sank below the horizon, we LAYERED UP, and headed for the RENDEZVOUS POINT to meet our own personal DARK RANGER GUIDE—KEVIN POE.

We bonded with Kevin instantly. Slightly irreverent, he had a quick sense of humor. On top of that, we found we had an even deeper connection.

KEVIN, it turns out, grew up in STEHEKIN on Lake Chelan, just uplake from HOLDEN VILLAGE, a place we have enjoyed stargazing on a number of occasions. And so we felt INSTANT RAPPORT.

Kevin had two big telescopes ready for us that night, and after a little orientation he took us, first, on a tour around the solar system—Saturn, Mars, Jupiter, and Venus...

...and then far beyond our solar system, to the constellations of Orion, Ursus Major (aka the Big Dipper), and Taurus, where we homed in on the cluster of stars known as THE PLEIADES or the Seven Sisters (which, by the way, is actually a cluster of a thousand stars)

As we progressed through the evening, the questions we asked (and Kai was particularly adept at this) shifted from the perfunctory to the profound, which led KEVIN to delve more and more deeply into the esoterica of the space time matrix: black holes, green suns, and how it is, exactly, that gravity can bend both light and time.

THIS GUY KNEW HIS STUFF!

As we neared the end of our time, Kevin focused the telescopes on an object none of us had ever seen before: MESSIER 82—the CIGAR GALAXY, a STELLAR NURSERY 12 million light years away.

WHAT A TREAT AND WHAT A NIGHT!

Well, after 2½ hours of stargazing, our feet and fingers growing numb, we finally called it quits. Kevin took us back to our RV and we said our goodbyes. And we drove back to our campsite with a renewed appreciation for the enormity of this star-spangled universe in which we find ourselves...

...ONE SO ASTOUNDINGLY VAST that there are (*wait for it...*) at LEAST 10,000 STARS for EVERY GRAIN OF SAND ON EARTH. **SING: COME WALK WITH US**

READING 2: John 7 & Romans 6

A readings from John.

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” ’

A reading from Romans.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

L Holy wisdom. Holy word.

C **Thanks be to God.**

VIGNETTE 2: A POOL IN LUTHERLAND

The FALL CHINOOK have been running like gang busters in the Sound the last few weeks—one of the best runs in years.

After 3 or more years in the ocean, the fish are making the journey back to their NATAL STREAM to SPAWN and then GIVE THEIR LIVES AWAY—something they’ve been doing annually for 4 million years or more.

Just HOW they find their birth stream remains cloaked in MYSTERY.¹

A key part of our sabbatical journey involved visiting places crucial to the life story of Martin Luther; seeking out what we might call HIS NATAL STREAM.

SO WE TRAVELED (though not in this exact order) TO...

- EISLEBEN, his BIRTHPLACE and the place where he was BAPTIZED;
- We stayed in ERFURT where he lived as a teenager & university student, and we visited the AUGUSTINIAN MONASTERY where, after a harrowing experience, he abandoned the study of LAW to become a MONK;
- We traveled to WITTENBERG, where he posted 95 THESES on the DOOR of the CASTLE CHURCH, kicking off the REFORMATION;

¹ Biologists suggest that salmon may use Earth’s magnetic field to navigate—along with other cues such as the ocean currents and the position of the sun—until they get close enough, and then they use an acute sense of smell to detect their natal stream. See *The Miraculous Nature of Salmon* by Liz McKenzie, in the Wild Explorers website: <http://www.encountersnorth.org/wildexplorer/salmon/natural-history.html>

- I went, SOLO, to AUGSBURG, where, ordered by CARDINAL CAJETAN to RECANT Luther REFUSED;
- We toured WARTBURG CASTLE where, living under an ASSUMED NAME in PROTECTIVE CUSTODY, Luther TRANSLATED the whole NEW TESTAMENT from GREEK to GERMAN in 11 months.
- OUR FINAL STOP on the Luther trail was WITTENBERG, home of the Augustinian monastery where he and KATIE were wed and St. Mary's Church, where their SIX CHILDREN were BAPTIZED.

Each place we visited contributed a piece to the puzzle of Luther's life and legacy. I want to share about one of them.

At several points in his life, Luther was poised on a knife's edge. Were it not for the timely interventions of friends, he could easily have joined the ranks of other so-called HERETICS who were burned at the stake.

EISLEBEN, where Luther's life began and ended, is the home of St. Peter and Paul Kirche, the church where he was baptized.

15 years ago, the congregation was poised on a knife edge of its own. 550 years of wear and tear had left the church building in a condition that begged the question: CAN IT BE SAVED?

To answer that question, a group of stakeholders from church, synod, and community held a series of conversations. And out of those conversations a consensus emerged: YES, they answered, the church building could be saved. But to what end?

You see, renovating the church BUILDING was one thing. Retooling its VISION was another. In order to move forward, it was agreed that those two things—the building AND the vision—would have to be combined.

BUT ALONG WHAT LINES?

Since BAPTISM is at the CENTER of Christian faith and life, and at the THEOLOGICAL CORE OF LUTHER'S THEOLOGY; and because Luther himself was baptized here, THE ANSWER BECAME OBVIOUS:

The renovation of building and vision would place BAPTISM at the VERY HEART of the congregation's life and mission.

What we saw, then, as we entered St. Peter and Paul Kirche the day of our visit was a soaring, light-filled space with a BAPTISMAL EMERSION FONT embedded in its stone floor, at the front of the nave.

Seeing that baptismal pool up close, kneeling down to touch its ever flowing water, was a powerful experience.

And IT WASN'T THE POOL ALONE—for excised into the stone tiles that surround the baptistry was a series of lines emanating out from the pool in every direction, like ripples in a pond.

Curving out they encompassed the ENTIRE SPACE, inviting, propelling, compelling that community to take their baptismal identity as God's Beloveds to heart, and move with it out the door and into the world.

THE GIFT, THE GRACE, THE EVER FLOWING WATERS OF HOLY BAPTISM—

This was Brother Martin's SOURCE STREAM, and it's OUR NATAL STREAM TOO.

And we are ever called, like our siblings the salmon, to return to the SOURCE; to SHARE the LIFE OF GRACE; and in so doing, to SEED NEW LIFE.

SING: COME WALK WITH US

READING 3: Denise Levertov

A poem by Denise Levertov.

It's when we face for a moment the worst our kind can do,
and shudder to know the taint in our own selves,
that awe cracks the mind's shell and enters the heart:
not to a flower, not to a dolphin, to no innocent form
but to this creature vainly sure it and no other is god-like,
God (out of compassion for our ugly failure to evolve) entrusts,
as guest, as brother, the Word.

VIGNETTE 3: STOLPERSTEIN ~ STUMBLING STONES

They're called STOLPERSTEINE – a German word that means, literally, STUMBLING STONES: 4 inch x 4 inch bronze plaques, embedded within pavements in 27 European countries – especially in Germany.²

² You can read more about the project here: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/holocaust-memorial-project-marks-milestone-with-100000-stumbling-blocks/> and here: <https://www.dw.com/en/stolpersteine-commemorating-victims-of-nazi-persecution/a-65770610>

We first spied them while on a walking tour of the Lichterfelde neighborhood, where we stayed during our two week sojourn in BERLIN, close to the home of Peace members Lisa and Michael Boeckh.

The STOLPERSTEINE are the brainchild of sculptor Gunter Demnig, who began the project illegally and without permission nearly 3 decades ago.

HIS MISSION: To give Holocaust victims back their names and dignity by calling attention to Nazi crimes, and ensuring the victims will not be forgotten.

"The STOLPERSTEINE are my life's work," he says Demnig.

Bending down at the sight of that first PLAQUE, we read:

KURT JULIUS FRIEDLANDER, BORN 1904,
DEPORTED 1943 TO AUSCHWITZ
MURDERED DECEMBER 31, 1943

The act of stooping, reading, digesting, witnessing, was—in a word—POWERFUL.

Once you spotted that first "stumbling stone" you started seeing them everywhere, calling for your attention, refusing to be ignored.

At times there would be a solitary plaque, a single name. Other times there'd be a group of them, each individualized, marking the place where an entire family once lived.

Lifting your gaze upward you see their last known residence; the home from which they were forcibly removed for their crime: Being JEWISH.

In May, Demnig laid the 100,000th personalized plaque for what has become the world's largest grassroots Holocaust memorial project.

Wherever we traveled in Europe the ghosts of ANTISEMITISM and the 3rd REICH were close at hand.

- In the PINKAS SYNAGOGUE of PRAGUE'S Jewish quarter, where the names of 77,297 Czech Holocaust victims are inscribed on the walls.
- At the HOME of DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, pastor, theologian, and martyr, whose commitment to the Christ alone, and whose involvement in a plot against Hitler led to his arrest and execution.
- Along the DANUBE in BUDAPEST, where a SHOE MEMORIAL pays tribute to post-war victims of fascist Arrow-Cross perpetrators.³

³ <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/shoes-on-the-danube-promenade.html>

- At the MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE that dominates whole city blocks in the heart of BERLIN.
- At SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP IN ORANIENBURG, the camp from which Nazi plans for the FINAL SOLUTION were administered.

Coming face to face with what cannot be explained—THE WORST OUR KIND CAN DO—was an essential part of our journey.

What we experienced left us with a whole lifetime of sorting and discernment. And yet, we did not come away from these experiences hopeless.

After our long, hot, and difficult day at SACHSENHAUSEN, we boarded the train in Oranienburg and headed back south to meet Lisa at the BERLINERDOM – the great Protestant Cathedral of Berlin.

We were going there—at Lisa’s suggestion—for the monthly Taizé service, and the timing couldn’t have been better.

In the coolness of the cathedral, with candlelight illuminated the vast space, we joined our voices with those of others, calling for the light of Christ to enlighten our darkness.

MY HOPE AND MY JOY, MY STRENGTH, MY LIGHT,
CHRIST, MY CONFIDENCE, we sang
IN YOU I TRUST AND AM NOT AFRAID

It was BALM FOR OUR SOULS.

Let us now join in singing: GOODNESS IS STRONGER THAN EVIL

READING 4: Proverbs 3:5-6

A reading from Proverbs.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge God,
and God will direct your path.

L Holy wisdom. Holy word.

C **Thanks be to God.**

VIGNETTE #4 – DOLOMITE REFUGIO

TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND DO NOT RELY ON YOUR LIMITED UNDERSTANDING.

This was the invitation to me, to us, throughout our trip. FAITH 101.

At times we succeeded in placing that trust. At other times, not so much. Yes... we (let me say I) am still learning.

As you can imagine, the LOGISTICS of a trip of this magnitude were a bit DAUNTING.

We purchased PLANE TICKETS and EURAIL PASSES months in advance, and SYSTEMATICALLY laid out each destination, nailing down dates and making reservations.

But even so, there were HOLES that remained; BLANKS that needed filling in.

The most concerning HOLES clustered around the 4 days we'd planned for HIKING in the DOLOMITE MOUNTAINS of northern ITALY.

There were three issues.

- The FIRST had to do with our planned ROUTE – was it too AMBITIOUS?
- The SECOND, related to the first, was which REFUGIOS (or mountain huts) we'd be staying in?
- And the THIRD, Where would we store our LUGGAGE while we were in the mountains hiking?

We tried valiantly to CRACK THESE NUTS prior to our departure, but just couldn't manage to do it. And so the CLOSER WE GOT to this part of our journey – the MORE ANXIOUS Chris and I became.

TWO DAYS before we arrived in the town of ORTISEI, our base in the Dolomites, I logged into a TRAVEL FORUM where I had posed the question months before:
Where in Ortisei can we could store luggage while we're off hiking?

And low and behold there was ONE response. It pointed to the SECEDA CABLE CAR STATION. I HAD MY LEAD!

Finding the number for the CABLE STATION, I called, and a kind woman told me that, while the STATION ITSELF had no storage, the SKI SCHOOL at the base of the station might...and she gave me their number.

So I call the ski school (which is actually bike shop in the summer), and a guy named ALEX answers.

The CLIFF NOTES version of our conversation went something like this:

ME Alex, we'll be in Ortisei soon and I hear you can store some luggage for us.

ALEX Well...hmmm...we're really not set up to do that...

ME We've searched for other options but there don't seem to be any.
Would you consider it?

ALEX How much luggage are we talking about?

ME 4 pieces – they're small – carry-on size...just for two days!

ALEX Alright... we might be able to do this. Let me confirm with my colleague SIMON. He'll be here tomorrow.

With the STORAGE ISSUE SEMI-SET, we arrived in Ortisei two days later and found our way to the private home where we'd be spending the night.

Soon, our host KILIAN comes out to introduce himself. Turns out he has a paragliding business and has been flying around these mountains for over 30 years. Needless to say, he knows these mountains.

COULD WE TALK TO YOU ABOUT OUR HIKING ROUTE? we ask. SURE, he says.

Minutes later he comes back with a wonderfully detailed topographic map—and we talk through the pros and cons of our proposed hiking route.

YOUR REFUGIO HOST WILL BE ABLE TO GIVE YOU MORE INFO, he says.

That night we repack our suitcases and backpacks, taking with us only what we'll need for our 3 day/2 night hiking adventure.

The next morning a TAXI takes us and our luggage to see ALEX at the foot of the CABLE CAR we'll be taking up the mountain.

But when we arrive, is ALEX there? No. Alex is not there.

SIMON, his colleague (and it turns out, his BOSS) is there, but we soon learn that ALEX NEVER DID TALK TO SIMON about storing our luggage; that THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SIMON HAS HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT IT! (Cue the hand-wringing...)

But Simon, to his credit and our relief, agrees to store our luggage anyway.

- I ask if he has hiking poles we can rent. He does.
- I ask if he has any maps he can sell us. He does.

And he pulls out the very same map KILIAN had shown us the night before. SIMON, I say, as I pay for the poles and map, HOW MUCH DO I OWE YOU FOR TAKING THE LUGGAGE?

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, he says.

BY THE WAY, I say, WHERE DO WE BUY TICKETS FOR THE CABLE CAR?

OH, says Simon, YOU CAN'T USE THIS ONE, IT'S UNDER MAINTENANCE. YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE THE ONE FURTHER UP THE VALLEY IN SANTA CRISTINA.

(GULP) OK, I say, CAN YOU TELL US HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Out comes the map again. And Simon shows us exactly where to catch the bus and where get off. Then, finally, we're on our way.

When the bus drops us off at Santa Christina a little while later, a FREE TAXI is sitting there, as if summoned in advance, and takes us up the steep, winding road to the gondola lift.

And at long last we're airborne, rising above the valley floor to see the great peaks of Sassalungo, and Sassiapato to the south, with the Puez-Odle group towering above us: Sass Rigais, Furchetta, and Fermeda, with Seceda on the East.

THE REST OF THE DAY we hike through that incredible landscape,

- winding our way along sheer cliffs,
- through blooming meadows,
- and past grazing cows,
- until we arrive at our first mountain hut, REFUGIO FIRENZE.

That evening, after a homemade meal, we take out our map once again, and our host TAMARA goes over the route options with us once more.

In the end, we conclude that our original plan was too difficult.

And we opt instead for day hiking on the morrow, and spending an additional night at Refugio Firenze.

And at long last, the ANXIETY we'd carried all those months MELTS AWAY.

And looking back at what transpired, we begin to see, so clearly, the marks of GRACE that accompanied us all along the way.

THANK YOU, GOD!

- For being faithful to us even when we were unaware;
- For guiding our feet, for sending angels our way.

TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART,
AND DO NOT RELY ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING.
IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE GOD,
AND GOD WILL DIRECT YOUR PATH

SING: COME WALK WITH US

READING 5: Psalm 133

We read Psalm 133 in unison.

See how good, how pleasant it is
when kindred live together as one!
It is like precious oil on Aaron's head
running down on his beard,
running down to the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Mount Hermon,
falling on the hills of Zion.
For that is where the LORD bestows the blessing—
life that never ends.

L Holy wisdom. Holy word.

C **Thanks be to God.**

VIGNETTE #5 – STEFANO AND LEONARDO

The Italian town of LUCCA became a destination for us largely because my older son NATHAN had raved about it after being there for a SUMMER OPERA PROGRAM as a graduate student.

And we were not disappointed.

LUCCA is famous primarily for two things:

- Its MEDIEVAL WALL – 10 meters tall and 30 meters thick – that encompasses the old city, PROTECTING IT on the outside and making it WONDERFULLY WALKABLE on the inside;
- AND for being the hometown of GIACOMO PUCCINI—composer of such opera classics as: *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Turandot*.

We had many great experiences—musical and otherwise—while in Lucca but I'd like to FOCUS ON AN ENCOUNTER WE HAD with a man named STEFANO.

Walking through the old city one morning, we came out from one of the narrow streets unto a PIAZZA that was home to Chiesa di San Cristoforo, the Church of St. Christopher.

On the steps of the church were signs announcing a FREE PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION inside. So we walked on over.

Stepping inside the church, we were met by STEFANO LOTUMOLO, a native son of Lucca, who welcomed us warmly and invited us to take our time walking through his exhibition.

Taking his invitation to heart, the four of us spent the better part of an hour walking through his presentation, which he titled: “INSPIRED BY THE PEOPLE.”

The exhibition followed his multi-year journey to different parts of the world – Africa, South Asia, Nepal – capturing moments in the lives of ordinary people as they lived their lives, practiced their traditions, and shared their stories.

The faces of his subjects FILLED the oversized frames he used, making the portraits both intimate and captivating. It was as if, through these photos, we were shown a pathway to their souls—and our own.

“Photography,” Stefano said, “has enlightened my path, gifted me with different eyes... opened my heart and saved my soul.”

IT SHOWED.

BOUNDARIES FELL AWAY as, through Stefano’s lens, we saw OUR COMMON HUMANITY and felt THE CALL TO LOVE AND CELEBRATE the FULL RANGE of what it means to be human, RECOGNIZING OURSELVES in THOSE who—on the surface—LOOKED SO DIFFERENT.

The effect was very powerful and touched an emotional chord—especially in Chris and also in me. After viewing the exhibition we spent time visiting with Stefano.

“I’m not trying to get anything out of this” he told us. “I’m a connector.”

He’s hoping to be able take his exhibition to venues here in the U.S.

We told him we would take that intention back with us to Seattle.

OUR FINAL DAY IN ITALY before flying home was spent in MILANO, where we had the privilege of seeing Leonardo’s LAST SUPPER mural at Santa Maria delle Grazie.

Da Vinci painted THE LAST SUPPER on an END WALL of the REFECTORY where the DOMINICAN MONKS took their meals.

In fact, at some point after Leonardo finished the mural, the monks CUT A HOLE IN THE WALL RIGHT UNDER WHERE JESUS SITS AT TABLE in the painting, to give easy access to the monastery KITCHEN, which was housed in the adjacent room.

THE OPENING AND CLOSING OF THAT DOOR, which allowed fumes, smoke, and moisture to escape the kitchen, contributed to the mural's deterioration over the years.

But the greatest factor in the mural's slow demise is the fact that Leonardo painted NOT on WET PLASTER, as for a conventional FRESCO, but on WALLS THAT WERE ALREADY DRY, thus necessitating many efforts at restoration the last few centuries.

Still, despite its fragile state, THE LAST SUPPER still speaks; capturing that moment in the Passion Story after Jesus announces: ONE OF YOU WILL BETRAY ME.

Imagine sitting there, day after day, in that dining hall, looking up at that scene as you eat your OWN meal; an extension of the disciple community

Imagine being called on every day, with every bite, and every glance, to be counted among the FAITHFUL rather than the FAULTY FOLLOWERS.

But the thing which sticks with me most from that encounter with Leonardo was how he constructed the MURAL in such a way that—being in that room makes it seem as if you really are a participant in the Meal he commanded his disciple community to carry on when he was gone. The MEAL we will partake of today.

It is his command to share in this meal that knits us together with followers of Christ from all times and places.

In a way I can't fully articulate, the work of Leonardo DaVinci and Stefano Lotumolo share a similar purpose: to help us SEE that we are part of God's great tapestry. That we are, each one, BELOVEDS.

SING BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY