

James Mehler

Faith Journey

My faith journey of 70 years began with my parents offering me for baptism at the age of six months. As would be expected, at that age I had little awareness of the path it set me on for the years which followed. It was that event, though, which has had more significance in my life than any other. Having little awareness of that baptism has afforded me the opportunity to consider what being baptized means in my life and for my faith.

There have been times when I engaged in that pondering. Being a child of the church, with parents involved in every aspect of church life, there did not seem to be a time when I was not encouraged to consider what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus. There was Sunday School, youth groups and church camps and God and Country awards and choir and family nights. Then, I went to college. Faith was something reserved for visits home and summers spent mimicking my parents' faith. It served me well, or so I believed.

The pastor at my home church and I engaged in some conversations which prompted a consideration of that baptism sprinkling. I came to understand that simple rite so many years before had a claim on me and required a response. As I retraced my steps from that simple sprinkling on, I began to sense a path which I did not necessarily apprehend, but one on which I found myself as I grew deeper in that call to be a follower.

Seminary offered a place to explore my budding faith. Yet, it was the 2 student pastorate opportunities while in seminary which spurred deeper growth. Joining with persons of faith, with their own journeys, broadened my understanding of faith. While it was, and is, monotheistic, it developed in a more Trinitarian expression. People in these congregations experienced the presence and power of God in their lives related to father, son, and holy spirit. (Ok. I'm old school, but these experiences awakened me to not a genderless God, but one in whom/which all human expressions find unity.) Through all my calls, and through all my ebbs and flows of faith, it has been the connections with people which have supported and sustained and prompted growth in my faith.

In years of ministry, I have served small town, suburban and city churches. And while the contexts were different, there has always been my belief and trust in a loving God of abundance and grace. In my ministry, I have served on committees, commissions, long range study commissions, new church developments at the presbytery and synod levels, and with missionaries (old school, again) and mission co-workers. I have been part of interfaith communities. I've volunteered domestically and in Central America. I've served on neighborhood boards and was on the board of the L'Arche Community in Erie founded by Jean Vanier. All of these experiences added to my experience of God as one present in the midst of lives and the world.

My faith is in process, still. Thanks be to God. As a wise preacher once said, "If you do not grow, you are dead." I may be dying, but I'm alive, alive in the one who continually amazes me and never stops drawing me back to a claim in a few sprinkles of water.

I paraphrase Kirk Franklin: When I think about Jesus and what he's done for us, I just wanna dance, dance, dance.