

WATERS – Faith Journey

With a Jewish father and a Lutheran mother – neither of them practicing – spirituality in my childhood home was effectively absent. Other than the tiny plastic one in the manger, our Christmases were decidedly Jesus-free. As were our Easters. However, my crafty mother assembled some of the best – if theologically bankrupt - Easter baskets around.

I remember attending Christmas Eve worship with my grandmother. It was a sort of seasonal torment, full of endless hymns and dreadful children's theatrics. My one vivid memory from those services is of an abstract bronze Madonna sculpture in the narthex. An exit ramp routed us close enough to touch the statue. I warmly recall her as *Our Lady of Elated Escape*. Still, a tiny flame of faithful curiosity managed to smolder within me.

As a young adult, husband, and father, I began to be aware of my spiritual journey. This was also the period when I first began to attend a church regularly. For a while, my wife took our boys to Catholic mass with her. Eventually, neither child saw the merit of sitting through church while dad got to stay home and eat cereal in his underwear. My wife, tired of wrestling two boys into the car, announced that we would begin attending some kind of church together – as a family. She understood my discomfort with Catholicism; I could either help her determine a new tradition, or live with what she picked.

Fearing something even worse than Catholic, I agreed to participate in the selection process. By the power of the internet, we found our local Presbyterian church. Also via the web, we learned a little about what Presbyterianism meant. It sounded harmless enough, so we visited. In truth, we could have walked into almost any denomination; had it been as warm and welcoming as the church we had found, we would have stayed there. In that place, our boys grew up with several additional sets of grandparents. In time, my wife and I enjoyed various roles – some with official titles, like “elder” and “deacon”, some less official like “counselor” and “confidant”.

Since then, I have carried new titles as I have explored this call to ministry: seminarian, youth leader, international traveler, chaplain, and, for the past two years, pastor of a local congregation. I was warned that this process would shake my understanding of God. Instead, I have found that this time of exploration has often served both to affirm my beliefs and to give me language to articulate them. For example, I had never known about general revelation before; I had, however, always believed viscerally that creation was intentional in its spectacular composition.

Finally, from my experiences thus far, I find myself affirming Henri Nouwen's understanding of the "clown" in ministry. Clowns, for Nouwen, are human bridges, occupying space between the spectacular and the mundane. We are clowns in this ministry role, insofar as we often bridge the mysterious of the holy and the profane of everyday living for people existing between those worlds. We are prophets of truth, speakers of prayers, baptizers of babies, holders of hands, distributors of elements, and buriers of bodies. Through this calling, we are not glorious, nor are we entirely common.