

In his poem *Celebrate Life* Collin McCarty says: “Let life help you find your belief and discover your God.” (*Creeds to Live By, Dreams to Follow*, Ed. Susan Polis Schutz, pp. 46-47) Life, as we know, is full of joys and sorrows, gains and losses, celebrations and struggles. In each of these experiences more life is waiting to be found and celebrated. Jesus’ gospel message is one of faithfulness to the journey of rediscovery in loss and celebration of the life that is eventually found.

This happens in many ways in our lives.

I think of our daughter’s lacrosse teammate at American University. Lauren tore her ACL during her junior year and endured a lot of emotional disappointment and physical pain. Not being able to play and the hard work of rehab was a tough journey to walk, but she persevered and discovered something deeper about herself in the process. In her faithfulness to this process her inner strength developed, her work ethic became even stronger, and she moved into a leadership role as one of the team captains her senior year. Through her loss she found something more about herself, and we all celebrated this discovery with her.

Last month the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Thursday, August 1, 2013, Section B, p. 1, 4) featured an article about Project Common Bond at Bryn Mawr College. This was a gathering of sixty young people from 12 countries who have lost family members to terrorism. The camp was designed to help them heal through sharing their experiences and to provide them with leadership and peacemaking skills to use in their communities. One 20-year-old, whose dad died at the World Trade Center on 9/11 said that he lived his life “pretending it didn’t happen.” He didn’t have to pretend at Project Common Bond because its atmosphere helped him feel safe enough to share. Each of these young people lost someone very dear to them. In sharing their experience with others who understand, they have found emotional healing. This journey of loss is helping them

discover who they are and that peace talks, not violence, are the way to greater understanding. The seeds of loss are giving way to life in their personal and communal lives—definitely a “find” to celebrate.

This past week I had a “chance” meeting with a woman who has known me since I was 7 years old. Yes, there is someone besides Mary who has known me that long! Her name is Grace, and this truly was a graced exchange. We had a wonderful conversation about her granddaughter’s upcoming wedding. She then told me that she heard about my ministry journey and was extremely supportive. She said that she missed seeing me at my former parish but had known for a long time I had a call. I told her I had needed to leave to search out what God wanted. This conversation brought me to the losing and finding of today’s gospel. I felt a deep sense of loss when I left St. Francis over 4 years ago, but in doing so I found who I really am and that this community is who I am to journey with. I find that each time I connect with a former parishioner at this level, there is something more to be discovered about their faith, my choice, and our connection as God’s people. Grace left me with the affirming words of authenticity as she said: “Keep doing what you want to do.” Her words speak directly to today’s message of faithfulness to the journey of loss, finding who we are as we travel that path, and celebrating the life we find.

Finally I’d like to offer a community example. This past week I received an email from Maryann Brady-Marks, a woman from Reading who has worshipped occasionally with our community and was here for the Mary Magdalene celebration in July. Because Maryann was unable to be here today, I asked her if I could share some of her experience with our community. Last week during her beach vacation she took time to reflect and rejuvenate. She thought of how she had lost some of herself in the stress and challenges of recent years but now realized she was

returning to her true self. She tried to pinpoint when this shift occurred, and her only conclusion was the anointing during our Mary Magdalene celebration. She was amazed how this moment of anointing with oil and with prayer led by Marge brought such healing that continues to unfold. She had lost something within herself and is now finding it again. She is so grateful to our Mary Magdalene community for its healing gifts. We truly celebrate with Maryann and celebrate God's working within and among us!

Although these stories speak to significant losses, there are other losses where God is just as faithful. We may have temporarily lost our playful spirit, and the sight of a young child playing carefree helps us rediscover it. Perhaps we feel that we've lost our edge or energy; being with someone who has a vibrant spirit *or* being quiet and reflective can restore our energy and help us find that "good edge" again.

All of these examples speak to personal and communal loss, finding, and celebration, and how faithful God is as we travel this path. As we travel through this week, I invite you to reflect on your story—on what you have lost, found, and celebrated. Listen to your deeper self and God's intimate faithfulness.

Let us live the words we began with by Collin McCarty: Celebrate Life. And let life help you find your belief and discover your God.

Scripture Readings—24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Exodus 32: 7-11, 13-14
1Timothy 1: 12-17
Luke 15: 1-10 (short form)

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