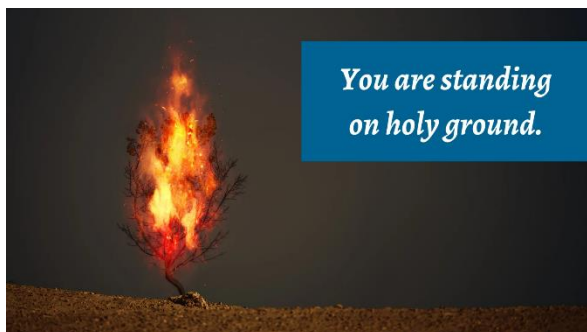




*You are standing
on holy ground.*

A little over a week ago, I learned that the pastor, who had been my Confirmation teacher, and served with my home congregation through my early college years, had died due to complications from Alzheimer's Disease. Of course, as his obituary started to make its rounds being shared online, personal memories started to beautifully emerge as well. Now, I would be lying to you if I said I remember anything at all from Confirmation, which may not be the smartest thing for a pastor to admit

out loud, but my first rather vivid memory with Pastor Jerry was from almost exactly 25 years ago; because it was the Sunday after September 11.

I was sitting in the balcony at the time, because that's where all the cool kids were during worship (or, for me, the ones who were trying to convince themselves they were cool, too). I still remember listening in a bit more than usual to the guy up front in the white robe. After all, the previous five days were an immense roller coaster ride of fears and all the human emotions that could not be explained or put into words at all. I remember wondering if maybe the pastor could shed some light on an unspeakable tragedy. However, what I remember most is a set of words I never expected to hear from any pastor: the one who's supposed to have obtained a fair share of knowledge to teach Confirmation and preach nearly every week, who's supposed to have this intimate connection with the Divine, the ultimate source of all the knowledge and truth and just knowing what to say in every possible instance encountered on this earth. And yet, he shockingly, but beautifully, said, "I don't know."

That sanctuary below was already special to me: junior choir plays, handbell choir preludes, vocal choir cantatas, Easter "Christ is Risen, indeed's" with trumpet blasts, Christmas Eve candlelight with "Silent Night;" it was already special to me. But on that Sunday, almost 25 years ago now, with the simplest, but most beautifully honest and vulnerable words, it felt as if the ground became holy that morning. Oddly enough "I don't know" how to explain it, but something stirred and ignited hearing the supposed know-it-all clergy cave into humility, into our basic human condition, into acknowledging that we don't just need a Christmas Eve and an Easter and plenty of the most memorable joys; we need the God who will ignite with hope when we are like Moses long ago, feeling as if we are bare in our supposed knowledge and wanting to have this whole world figured out.

But looking back, I wonder if the ground was already holy before that particular Sabbath worship, and not because of Pastor Jerry or the numerous others of that church who selflessly pulled off this and that to shape memorable moments, to be sure, to be remembered for quarters of centuries and beyond. The ground was already holy, because God was dwelling there all along, just as majestically and as brightly as long ago before the eyes of Moses, who wondered what this God could possibly be up to in him and the whole world.

Now, one thing about Pastor Jerry that I came to appreciate is that he was the one who had me fall in love with the possibility that holy ground could be wonderfully experienced outside church building walls. Pastor Jerry would have you believe that even the pig farm from his childhood years was holy ground, because not only did his parents raise him and his four siblings, but that they fostered other children along the way. Holy ground that would give hope to those precious youth of God, to be sure. Pastor Jerry would have you believe that the Lutheran summer camps, where he insisted us rather begrudging Confirmation students to go, because he could not help himself but wanting to give us a holy chance to see our faith blossom. Pastor Jerry would have you believe that even at the end of his earthly journey, when he was living at a care center, away from his home, and the disease was doing its best to diminish his memory and his wordsmithing talent; he was still somehow able to lift his tenor voice to

sing his respective part on the cherished hymn, "How Great Thou Art." That maybe holy ground can still stand in the shadows of death.

Except, as the story so goes with Moses, the igniting light emerges not to shock the bewildered Hebrew child of God, but to call attention to the Divine identity: the God of all generations, and the God of the spectacular joys of life, as well as the fear-filled moments, and the times when we just don't have a clue. Moses supposedly didn't at the time, but God called him anyway: to be part in giving hope to an entire people who felt as if they lost absolutely all of it. It is the same God who stills calls us today; still shining just as shockingly and simply and beautifully all at once: to convince us to do whatever we can to traverse the holy ground and help others believe that they are standing on it, too; not because they did this or that to make it happen, but because God insists on lovingly dwelling with them through it all.

Of course, Pastor Jerry would be the one to tell you not about his own life or ministerial accomplishments. He would be the one to tell you about imperfect, but thoroughly precious, children of God who had him believe that he had the Divine light shining within him to go share with whoever would come along his earthly journey. And so, safe to say, he was certainly one of them for me. So, simply be aware, dear church, of the impact you can have, when just as bright of a light that shined in front of Moses long ago, is doing exactly that in you now; that you may beautifully bear the Gospel: that no disease, no fear, no uncertainty, not even death itself, nothing can happen in all Creation to separate Pastor Jerry or any of us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. So, for that Greatest News proclaimed not just on Easter Sunday, but today and all our days: thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!