

There is an image of a labyrinth on the front cover of your bulletin. Labyrinths are not mazes. There is no dead end on this path, just a circuitous journey to the center. The Labyrinth is an ancient symbol, appearing in many different cultures. Christianity picked up the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey pretty early on. The labyrinth on the cover of the bulletin is modeled from the one in Chartres Cathedral in France. It was laid into the floor of the cathedral in the 1200's. A number of cathedrals across Europe had labyrinths in the Middle Ages.

Christians across Europe often went on pilgrimages. To holy sites, but ultimately, to the Holy Land. But because of the danger and expense of travel, and because of the Crusades, many pilgrims were not able to make it to Jerusalem. So, instead, they would travel to these large cathedrals across Europe. And the labyrinth would become the final part of their journey.

Scholars aren't exactly sure when or why labyrinths fell out of favor in Christian practice. Most likely, the rise of Scholasticism and the emphasis on what could be known about God in the mind, that developed during the Reformation signaled the end of this contemplative practice. Many of the labyrinths were actually pulled out of the floors of cathedrals. The one in Chartres remains, and it is a powerful experience to walk this path that pilgrims have been walking for nearly 1,000 years.

I would like to invite you to consider the labyrinth as you journey through Lent to Easter. If I had a giant labyrinth laid out in the parking lot and were to ask each of you to go stand somewhere on the path, you couldn't know who was closer to the center and who was closer to the entrance. Because the path of the labyrinth is full of twists and turns. At first it seems like you're headed straight to the center, but then it loops you all the way back out to the outer ring. And our Christian faith is like that too. You can't look at someone and know where they are on their journey. You might think—'they've been coming here for years. I'm sure they have it all figured out.' And you might be right. But you might not. The only way to know where someone is on the path is to walk with them. To journey with them.

The Psalmist wasn't, to my knowledge, talking about labyrinths when the 25th Psalm was composed, but our lectionary text as we begin Lent is about someone praying for wisdom for the journey. "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation." There is no promise in this psalm that the paths will be paved with gold, or unicorns, or puppies. But the paths of God are steadfast love and faithfulness.

As we think about the path we're on in this journey of faith, I want to talk for a bit about the end of the path. None of us know the course our journey will take. Do we have years and miles to go? Or are we approaching the place where the sidewalk ends? Because we do know, of course, that death is the end of the journey here on earth.

Society has invented all sorts of ways for us to forget about this. Hair dye, plastic surgery, and the culture of eternal youth keep us from talking about death.

Yet our faith calls us to be aware. To remember, as we said on Ash Wednesday, "from dust you are, and to dust you shall return." Even the ritual of baptism, which we'll celebrate today when Alan joins the church, is about dying to our old lives and being born to a new life in Christ.

We were talking about baptisms at committee night last month and Evelyn said that her baptism was a horrible memory. She was old enough to remember it. It was full immersion. And she was afraid of the water. While, in some ways, it is too bad that her memory of such a sacred moment is laced with fear of death, I wonder if she understands the significance of dying to this life and being reborn to a new life in Christ better than those of us who had "safe" and "tame" baptisms?

I would like to ask each of you to think about your death. And to talk about it with your loved ones and family.

A number of years ago, I brought up the subject with my parents, only to discover that my dad had planned his entire memorial service. But nobody, not even my mom, knew about it. It was written down on a scrap piece of paper and folded up into his wallet. He had scripture passages, hymns, all kinds of things picked out. But none of us would have known about it. So now, when that day comes, it will be easier for us to plan the service he would want to have.

So often, we don't bring it up because we don't want to seem macabre or depressing. But look at it this way—if you have a conversation with your family now about your wishes, you will give them a gift if the time comes that they need to know what you think about extraordinary life saving measures.

Because that is not the conversation you want to have to have with your family while a loved one is needing to be hooked up to a ventilator.

To make this conversation easier for you, I have some resources that I hope you will pick up after worship. One of them is a Memorial Service planning document called “Christian Witness in the Event of Physical Death”. You can fill out as much or as little as is helpful to you. You can keep it in your files. You can give a copy to us here at the church and we’ll keep it for you. But what I hope is that it will start a conversation with your family.

In addition to questions about any memorial service preferences you might have, there are also questions about what you’d like done with your body, what your preferences for memorials are, and other details that you might know the answers to, but that might be hard for your family to discern.

This form is not meant to be invasive. You certainly don’t have to fill it out and turn it in, and don’t think that the questions we’ve listed are the only questions for you to discuss with your family. This is a place from which to begin the conversation.

We also have copies of Idaho’s Living Will/Durable Power of Attorney form. You can also print these out from the Idaho Attorney General website, but please fill one of these out. Talk it over with your family and with your family doctor.

(all of these documents can be found at the church’s website:www.spcboise.org)

If you would like to talk with me about these things, I hope you will come by to do that. And if you don’t care at all about what happens when you die, that’s okay. But tell your family that too, so that they’ll be free to make the best decisions they can make.

If talking with your family about these things is too difficult for you, I still hope you will spend some time thinking about these topics. Because acknowledging our own mortality is one way we can better value and appreciate our own living. It is living with integrity that each part of the journey is a piece of the whole. And it is God who guides our paths, no matter where we may be on the journey.

So, as we continue down this path toward Easter, where Jesus will completely change our understanding of death and new life, I hope that we can begin some conversations that will make our whole journey better, and will help us better appreciate how all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.