

Seeking the holy in a labyrinth

By walking the path set out for me, I cede control of my destination.

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For they will be made holy who observe holy things in holiness, and those who have been taught them will find a defense. . . . Wisdom goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought. —[Wisdom 6:10-16 \(NRSV\)](#)

I don't usually think of walking a labyrinth as a commitment. I may set an intention before I enter, but the path has already been laid out for me. The way is clear. I know I will arrive at the center before too long. How slow or fast I decide to walk or how long I choose to stay in its center are not usually significant factors. I don't know that I've ever spent 30 minutes in the labyrinth.

Until today. The labyrinth at GilChrist retreat center in Michigan is a commitment.

It did not seem that way when I approached it. I did notice that while the path was laid out, it was built into a hill. While the way is clear, parts of it are steep. In every labyrinth, you journey to and away from the center. But never too far away. And the center is always in sight.

But in this labyrinth, only from the center can you see all of its ways. Even the entrance can be obscured. I was forced to walk by faith, trusting that this labyrinth would not be a maze. That it would lead me to where I sought to go.

Regardless of its length, a labyrinth is intended to be a journey. Today certainly was. Modeled after the labyrinth at Chartres, the long segments around the outside almost made me forget I was in the labyrinth it had been so long since I made a turn. It was actually on the first long edge that I realized how big this labyrinth was. From beginning to end, I walked nearly two miles. I happened to be on a walk when I arrived, so I had my Garmin. Who needs a Garmin in a labyrinth?

I had not planned to spend over 20 minutes just to arrive at the center of this labyrinth. As I continued to turn, I wondered how many people give up and just walk to the center. How many walk straight out? [I've written before](#) that I cannot bear to cross the markers on a labyrinth. Last year, I hosted a retreat at my house. As I watched people walk the labyrinth, I had a visceral reaction as some walked straight to the center or across to see the cross.

There is nothing sacred about the labyrinth itself; its very construction does not make it holy ground. But for me, the labyrinth represents submission to the Holy. By walking the path set out for me, I cede control of my destination. Finding both comfort and frustration in its constant turning, I am forced to slow down. To obey.

When I realized how long this labyrinth was today, I thought for a moment that it was too much. I felt that I should have been warned that the path would be so long. I wondered how long it would take me to get back to a hot cup of coffee and a fire after being out in the cold so long.

The path to the top is long and straight—almost the radius of the labyrinth. Here I sat down on the wet, cold ground. Not because I was tired, but because I was reminded of my prayer on Maundy Thursday: to find the holy.

I am on retreat for two more days before I go to a conference. While I have sermon preparation I want to get done (need to get done, since I'm preaching the day after I return), I am also hoping to find the holy. I'm hoping to settle into the quiet and solitude in way that slows my mind. To reflect on the journey that has brought me here and the journey I will take when I leave. I'm praying to be present to the Holy that is already here, waiting for me to submit, to accept, to obey.

To be, so that I may become.

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