

Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance (isa) Intergroup Newsletter

Fall Equinox 2019

A Reflection

by Tom J

A Season of Preparation

Step 6: “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”

I was not going to participate this year in what has become a tradition at the Mound across the river, currently the home of an order of nuns. It was raining, I had a phone meeting to attend and besides the calendar designated the beginning of fall on 9/21, two days from this day. Yet the newspaper’s weather page said equal light and darkness would be 9/26: I wondered “who’s right?” My answer came when I joined the gathered community outdoors at the Mound: we were told that the Mound was the original home of the Pottawatomie tribe before the arrival of the “turtle tribe” (so called occupying white settlers) – not only did the hubris of my white European ideas about time and ownership humble me, but the heaviness of the rain-soaked dark clouds left a sobering cover over the gathered “celebrants” around the burning scrap oak wood from the monk’s casket enterprise from across the river. We sang softly as a reminder to listen to the woods and the wind speaking through the rain, then we disbursed for a time of solitary reflection. As was my custom, I headed directly to the labyrinth, intending to hear what HP would say at this time of seasonal change, with the words of poetry and scripture still ringing in my ears: “fall is a time of preparation for death, a ‘letting go’ of that which is being held too tightly.” The wind nudges the twigs to let go of their hold on the dying leaves which fall gently to the ground, leaving naked branches to face the ravages of winter.

I entered the circular journey of the labyrinth, intent upon walking the path to the center, then reversing the journey on the same circuitous path back to the place where I began; but about a third of the way in, I stopped abruptly at the foot of a giant white oak overshadowing the pathway – it looked dead, with bark separated from the trunk like molting snake skin. Many branches were stripped of all signs of life, yet at the same time many branches were full of leaves waiting their turn to be nudged to the ground. It was as if the tree stood in testimony to the delicate balance of the Fall Equinox, tottering between life and death. I struggled as I stared at the tree: “why have you been saved from the sawyer’s cutting blade?”, knowing a full-scale campaign was underway to thin these woods of all invasive species, returning this land to the native oak savannah. Certainly, a dead white oak would serve no purpose in the “new woods” planned for the Mound. My thoughts were interrupted when it started to pour – I left the labyrinth for the shelter of the car, joining the others as our reflections were cut short. While waiting for the rain to subside, I called the Mound’s forester – he said the white oak was indeed

dying, but it was dying of old age, not some pestilence or human predicament. Yet he said the tree was spared the sawyer's blade because it was not harming anyone – he also said that sometimes trees are more useful in death than in life, because they serve as hosts to innumerable creatures in their dead trunks.

Finally, the rain let up, so I returned to the labyrinth, fully intending to pick up on the journey to the center and then back out; but my plans were foiled when I chose to go the wrong way: the journey led me back to the entrance prematurely. The dead tree marked the right entry spot, but I chose to walk in the wrong direction. Life can be just as confusing for “dis-placed people”. I felt “out of balance”, like I was not going where I wanted to go, but the wind reminded me that “I will always end in the beginning where I am supposed to be, and I will see it new for the first time”.

On a stump at the entrance to the labyrinth (the remnant of a tree felled last winter) the nuns had placed a bouquet of mums in their full autumnal beauty – the brilliant orange stretched the full three feet across the stump. Not only did the color and the placement of the bouquet add to the drama of the labyrinth's journey, but at the base of the stump, visible only to those completing the journey, was another bouquet placed there by the hand of nature. To my utter astonishment, large disc-shaped heads of mushrooms were seen colored to match the mums above them, as if the orange from above was so brilliant it spilled over the stump to color the fungi at its base.

Step Six is a reminder to give over to HP the many fungi growing at the base of the dead trees of our lives; when we “let go” of our attempts to change them, they will be turned into a beautiful bouquet of traits to brighten the journey of those on the path of recovery. Our character traits are like the dead trees left to grace the pathway of recovery: they serve a useful purpose in HP's economy. These traits may be more useful in death than they are in life, given our willingness to relinquish our control of them into the caring hands of HP.