Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 2, Session 6 — 24 minutes

Summary: Russell opens a last round on gratitude and what is challenging. A participant describes a labyrinth walk that felt right and connected. Russell tells of building the labyrinth with friends from Santa Sabina, then sketches Saturday's music celebration and Sunday's walk. Others speak of acceptance, belonging, and welcoming difficulty in a life-giving way.

Opening

[Russell:] Let's just pause for a moment. Just a few more people. I just want to let us all come to presence, so that if we're not speaking, our listening is whole and complete, and if we are speaking, our listening is fresh.

Maybe similar to what you were going to say before, but allowing the possibility that something new wants to come. And you're opening to the questions of what you're celebrating or grateful for, or, from that big view, what's living in.

Then that question about the next — the challenges, the edges — and when you have that large perspective, is there something that might want to be known if you open the space for it?

An honest asking, honestly questioning. Loving the questions that we can ask ourselves authentically, not to show that we know the answer, but kind of to show that we don't, and that we're open to discovery.

If any of our friends who haven't spoken would like to speak, the space is open. And if you'd rather not speak, the choice is open.

[Silence 49 seconds]

A walk that felt right

[Participant 1:] I really don't have anything I'm going to say, so it's just me.

And what I really get is, at this moment, just deep gratitude for being with all of you, and the light and the space, and the — me. And to me.

And I — what's next, I really don't know.

I'm on the labyrinth. What I noticed was, it felt right. It felt like my life, and everything, is right.

And I loved that you spoke of the possible continuation of another labyrinth time, because last time, when I walked — I was here and walked it before — and I was in a — I just need to feel this.

Much of the walking before was questioning whether I was doing it right. And I felt separate, and there was a real opening in that walking. But this time it felt like every bit of the way was just another step. But it was something about that. I don't even know much more.

Well, there's something more. It was with everybody. I was connected. I felt the presence of all of you, but there was also something bigger than that. And I guess that's — I'm grateful for that too.

Thank you.

Building the labyrinth

[Russell:] Cece's Santa Sabina group, that she's also in, with the first group to walk the labyrinth. We had finished it a few days before. I can't remember. That day, maybe. Right — the day I came, and then a few days later we came up and walked.

It was about five tons of rock we needed to haul over here. I mean, we had trucks dump it, but we had to take it with wheelbarrows and then carry them over to place them. So we had volunteers and friends come over, and it was a labor of love. Some days of fixing the — once we had the tractor level the area, then getting it leveled.

DG — well, road base underneath, that we had to use a vibrator to get it in. And then DG, the decomposed granite, a few layers of that on top, because you really have to compress it, and then you have to try to get it all flat. None of us knew how to use a laser, so we had to keep working with it over and over, and then get the rock.

And so it really felt — I'm so grateful that we chose to do it, because I feel so bodily — see, it's so personal. Really, I had never used one of those before, and it's a shake.

Some of you know the woman who runs Santa Sabina, Sister Margaret, who's in the mentorship program, and the congregation pays for her to do the mentorship. So these sisters are very supportive of the Embodied Life work, from the whole Dominican congregation.

I go to their — yeah, the board meetings. But then I go to the congregation meetings once a year, where it's the people who run the whole thing, and they're very into the life work.

We did a meeting last year of Northern California — about five priests, and then the nuns that run the retreat centers in Northern California. And I had them rolling on the floor and doing resource processes. And they loved it. I so appreciate their openness.

So Sister Margaret — she's still talking about being up here for the labyrinth walk. It meant so much to her.

The weekend

[Participant 2:] No, I have a question first. Are we going to walk the labyrinth again tomorrow?

[Russell:] Yeah, so I'll tell you a little bit of scheduling. I think you already know — well, if you read my email — that Saturday evening we're going to have a special event here. A celebration of — it's technically called the incarnation of the soul.

And it's about embodiment, but it's a very unusual form. Linda led this event a couple of weeks ago, and the music is so profound that I just said, I want you all to experience this piano, played. So I arranged for the pianist to come up from San Francisco.

And there are readings connected, some of which you won't connect with. You know, it's a different spiritual tradition. It's a lot of Rudolf Steiner, so some of you will go, oh, I love this, and some of you will go, what?

But I know the music will speak to you. And it doesn't matter whether you connect with some of the readings, none of the readings, all of the readings. But it's the sound.

And then Sunday morning, once a month, Linda has some kids come over. Families — just a few, three or four families — and she does a service. This year it's based around certain virtues, so she will be, in a kids' form, working with courage. And that's one of our themes also.

So what that day looks like is, we start at 6:30, and we do a 25-minute sit, and then we go walk the labyrinth on Sunday morning at about 7 o'clock. The sun is just coming in. And then we'll come back in and we'll sit again, if there's time. I have to see what time we finish the labyrinth. We may just stay outside and do some gestures.

Then we'll have breakfast, and you'll have, oh, probably about an hour. It's a good time to clean up your rooms. It's like 9 to 10. And then from 10 to 11:30, we will join them for a story, some movement, a song, all around courage. And then when they leave at 11:30, we'll have our last meeting, and then we'll have lunch at 12:30.

That's what Sunday looks like. So we walk the labyrinth on Sunday morning.

And I think you might find it — well, we'll see. I hope you find it touching and moving and congruent with what we're doing.

[Participant 2:] What time are we going to walk it? Did you say what time?

[Russell:] Right around 7 in the morning.

[Participant 3:] The musical thing — it would be fine to invite Mesa.

[Russell:] Well, it's classical piano. I don't know if he likes classical piano. And we sit in chairs, listening.

Basically, what happens is a piece is played — some Beethoven, some incredible piece of music that knocks your socks off — and then somebody stands up and reads a piece. It's rather esoteric. Much of it I know nothing about, but I like some of it. Mostly I'm there for the energy of it, and the sound is so astounding.

And each time I hear it, it feels a little bit more — I can get, kind of, even though it's not my tradition, I get the profundity of it.

So he could try. We could see. There's no one else coming. Pete might come, but the public's not invited. It's just us. So we can try it.

[Participant 3:] You okay with me? Did you say Robert was coming as well?

[Russell:] Robert, I believe, thought he could come Friday for dinner. I told him it would be best Saturday, so he could have dinner and enjoy the celebration. But he wasn't sure, because they're moving. He and Elizabeth are moving to Corvallis, Oregon, to be with the kids. So right now they're in the midst of packing up their whole house, to be ready. And I think the moving day is Monday, so they're really in the midst of all that packing. So he wasn't sure when he could get away, but he intends to come. We will see him, I'm almost sure.

Long answer to your question.

Gratitude and the challenging bits

[Participant 4:] So I haven't really come prepared with anything to say.

I'm very grateful for the work that I've been a part of for these three years. And it became even more apparent to me when I was at the graduate retreat, where there were six of our group, I believe, and maybe eight or nine people from groups that we had not had any contact with. And yet it felt like the same safe environment that I have become so accustomed to with our group.

And it's become increasingly clear to me that maybe I am changing, to be more accepting of other people's viewpoints and presence, as a result of this work. I'm very grateful for that.

I was a little bit taken aback when Russell said earlier that he and his family are now doing the gratitude practice, and they bring up afterwards what is challenging in the day. Tony and I have been doing a gratitude practice, thanks to Aaron, for over a year now. And I've always studiously avoided talking about the challenging bits, because I figured they will come up anyway. And we don't need to emphasize that, which is pretty much what I took you to say very early on in the program.

It's kind of this default setting for our brains. You know, you think of the problems first, and then, if you're lucky, you can think of the stuff that's really good about the rest of your life.

But I think at this stage, maybe I can introduce the challenging bits as well, because they are part of life for both of us. And maybe they just want to be seen too.

[Russell:] Beautiful. We can talk more about it another time.

There are ways of approaching what is challenging that are not the same as getting into our problems.

So I would like to invite, at the right time, the difference between a life-giving way of acknowledging, and even, funnily enough, welcoming the challenges. That's different than just kind of falling into them, or complaining about them, or letting them take you down.

And it's worth distinguishing.

Trusting the turns

[Participant 5:] So, one of the things that was said, just touching on the labyrinth walk and what Linda pointed to, is the power of the turns. And I really was just getting that — the sense of trusting the turns, and more the path. Like, suddenly I'm turning away from something, or turning towards something.

And I'm so grateful for this connection with you, and our community, and a path that really leads toward intimacy with all of my life.

And when you were talking before about those systems of oppression, and how there was so much of that underlying aspects of other teachers that I've studied with, other paths that I've followed — this kind of — yeah, there's that.

There's something that's really alive for me about a recommitment to being a learner as a teacher, and being a teacher as a student. Both of those really struck.

Home and belonging

[Participant 6:] Thanks. When I was reflecting on just the challenges and the gratitude, it feels like there's something connected to what Karen said about finding the home in this interesting web of lineage. And the gratitude is when I feel at home, and the challenge is when I somehow lose that sense of belonging. Like, what am I doing with all this? Where's it going?

Yeah, it's a lot for me.