

My Walk to Emmaus Experience **Rick Seifert, Database/Website Support**

When I was in my early 40s, everything seemed to be going my way. I had a great job at Dell. I have a wonderful wife and 3 amazing children. We had great neighbors and friends and a wonderful church family. But somehow, I wasn't feeling totally fulfilled. It was like something was missing, but I couldn't put my finger on it. A good friend asked me if I would be interested in deepening relationship with Christ and his question came at the right time and place for me. I jumped at the opportunity to go on a Walk to Emmaus in hopes that I could find what I was missing.

Now, dial forward almost 20 years. Here I sit, in late July of 2020, the year that will be hereafter known as the "year of the pandemic". I retired from my corporate job in January, when there was but a whisper of a strange new disease in China. I wasn't exactly miserable at work, but I certainly wasn't doing anything new or fun or interesting and it was affecting my leadership and reflecting on the people on my team who were young, talented and energetic and needed a leader who had passion to inspire them.

After a couple of years of trying new things at work, I sat down with my wife to discuss my situation. She reflected that she could tell I just wasn't getting the same joy out of my job as I had in the past when over 4 decades, I was continuously challenged with new roles, new skills, new ideas, and new experiences. We agreed to see if early retirement was an option.

Everything was set – I had done my financial analysis and reviewed it many times with my wife and financial advisor. We used all the different scenarios they had available and while we wouldn't be rolling in dough in our retirement, we would be comfortable and there would be enough to enable us to start chipping away at our bucket list of world travel. We planned a trip with another couple to Puerto Vallarta, a trip to South Padre, a family trip to Alaska, trip to the South Carolina Coast with my siblings, a trip with two couples to Scotland and Ireland, and a cruise from New Zealand to Australia – all within my 1st year of retirement. Woo Hoo!

Through February as the 1st trip to approached, the new novel virus, Covid-19, was showing signs of becoming a pandemic. The first cases in our area would not be confirmed until early March, so we watched the pandemic like spectators watching a sporting event. First it was China, then Europe, and then Northeast and Northwest of the US started see the rise in cases with an alarming death rate. We took our trip to Puerto Vallarta as the stock market started having some signs of weakening and while we were in Mexico, the bottom fell out. BAM – suddenly my retirement fund didn't look so healthy after all. When we returned and re-ran the financial analysis – things looked bleak. Then the realities of the pandemic and associated lockdown caused us to postpone or cancel much of our travel and we went into lock-down mode.

One side-benefit of the pandemic has been the time to do a lot of reading and I started a novel called "The Sparrow" by Mary Doria Russell. In the novel, a Jesuit priest is asked, "Do you experience God?" His answer, "Not directly. Not as a friend or a personality, I suppose. Not, I think, even 'in a tiny whispering sound.'"

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Matthew 25:35-36

As a reflect on the last 6 months, I find myself wondering how in the world I didn't have a total meltdown and fall into a deep depression. But the answer is simply – Faith! Throughout all the changes that came our way, God has been a constant. I have been able to see him in all aspects of this pandemic.

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God put me to work:

- We quickly moved our weekly men's breakfast/Bible study, "Band of Brothers", to the Zoom platform.
- We used Zoom for in 2019 to enable remote attendance for a brother on temporary Dallas assignment\
- I became technically savvy with Zoom during that time.
- When the long-time leader of the group "retired", I took over leadership just before COVID.
- When it became clear we couldn't continue church services in the sanctuary, I joined a small group of people that teamed with our pastor to pull together a Zoom-based worship service.
- I have helped members who are not "tech-savvy" learn to use Zoom and now we have members joining that were not able to physically attend church even before the pandemic.
- Each week, I am a zoom "stage-hand" as we use Zoom live and then record the sermon for those who can't attend the Zoom meeting.
- After we got the church zoom services working smoothly, my volunteer job at Round Rock Senior Access restarted enabling me to help those who can't drive attend appointments.

I see God in this simply sequence of events that has enabled our church family to continue to worship and study during our pandemic and kept me from being overwhelmed in the process.

It was my Walk to Emmaus that provide the tools I needed to grow in my faith journey and teach me to channel my work through my church. It is through my Emmaus family that I continue to draw strength and spiritual renewal. It is this strong foundation that kept me working for the Lord! Do I experience God? The answer is a clear "yes" for me – every day of my life!

Amen!

