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I grew up a very lucky child in a loving Catholic family in Iowa, the second son, and the third of five children. As a boy, I remember saying the rosary as a family quite often, particularly in the car on the weekly trip home from my grandparent's house. My mom's brother was a priest and theologian, both my parents were avid readers and debaters, and so there was always plenty of religious talk around the family dinner table.

My parents were huge influences on my life. They loved God, each other, our family, and pretty much everyone else they met, black, brown, or white, well off or poor, educated or uneducated, religious or non-religious, it didn't matter. My mom attended daily Mass, loved raising a family, and volunteered for just about everything. My dad was a hard-working businessman, who modeled integrity, honesty, and generosity, and being comfortable in his own skin. They enjoyed the little things in life immensely, and always seemed to be doing things for others. They were extraordinary examples for me and my siblings.

Prayer was ingrained in me early. The idea that the all-powerful and all-knowing God loved us and actually wanted us to talk with Him as much as possible was my belief for as long as I can remember. Jesus was my constant companion, in good times and in bad.

And I was taught God was merciful. I remember at an early age thinking forgiveness by God made sense because nothing I or anyone else ever did would surprise Him. He was omniscient. So if I committed a sin, God might feel bad at the time of my actually doing it, but He had a long time to get ready for it, since He knew for a long time it was coming, even before I was born. For some reason, that was comforting. (And yes, we talked about sin openly in those days of my Catholic school education.)

For me, prayer always lightened things up. When critical self-questioning would enter my thoughts, when I really fouled things up, I could always think "Well, this is a mess I've made, Lord, but we'll deal with it together. Help me relax about it." This was my version of my mother's admonition to "offer it up."

Marriage to Kathy, who was not raised in the Catholic culture, and the arrival of our two kids Carrie and James led us to St Columba's as we looked for a spiritual home for all of us. What a blessing it has been!

About 10 years ago I began to experience a shift in my understanding of my faith and of God and Christ, a shift that I imagine many people undergo, but which seemed profound to me. I had always been a "big tent" Christian and believed anyone who sought to do right in their life was infused by the Holy Spirit, whether they knew it or not. But I was in search of a spiritual truth that made room for people of all faiths, yet honored each tradition, especially my own Christianity, based on Jesus Christ.

The shift came principally through books. In 2006 I bought a book called "Inspiration: Your Ultimate Calling" by Wayne Dyer. I can remember the day. This book and others by Dyer I later read described God as the source of an all-pervasive field of spiritual energy that is infinitely creative, kind, loving, beautiful, abundant, and ever-expanding. Moreover, this all-pervading divine energy was available to all. We just need to become aware that we are already connected to it, and through it, to everyone and everything around us. Our job was to live in harmony with Spirit, to match up with this field of energy. Dyer gave examples of persons in history who lived this way, starting with Jesus, which I was very happy about, but including spiritual masters of other traditions. He also recommended meditation as an essential practice to do this.

So I began to meditate and to read other books about spiritual awareness and spiritual awakening. Some of my favorites were by Richard Alpert, the Jewish Harvard professor who in the 60's experienced extraordinary mystical awareness, first through Psilocybin mushrooms, (which I wasn't going to try!) but then in a life-transforming way through a relationship with an enlightened Hindu guru in India. This led him to change his name to Ram Dass, meaning "Servant of God," and to devote his life to service. Others included Byron Katie, Anthony De Mello, and

Eckhart Tolle, whose book "The Power of Now" begins with the memorable line "You exist to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. That is how important you are." That sure caught my eye.

So, following the example of these and other saints in our own tradition, with fits and starts, I continue to try to quiet my mind, open my heart, and become more spiritually aware. These teachers' emphasis on the present moment, detachment from ego, increased consciousness, and the mystical oneness with God and all life continues to resonate strongly. This process also helped me realize the importance of building community here and now, and I'm so thankful for St. Columba's for all the opportunities we have to do that, through outreach, adult formation, hospitality, and many other ways.

Our Friday morning book group here at St. C's has been studying the writings of Jesuit priest and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, which has further impacted my faith. For Teilhard, the whole universe, including us, is part of the Total Body of the Risen Christ, which is constantly maturing and evolving to greater consciousness. And our role is to love and serve the world, both its visible and invisible dimensions, to enable the Risen Christ's divine destiny to unfold, which is for all of creation to become conscious of itself as part of God. You might also call that wholeness.

I don't know where all this leads. My faith story is still evolving. But I believe now that my faith story is part of everyone else's faith story, and indeed of our whole universe's faith story. That's how great God is. I feel lucky to be a part of it, and to be a part of St. Columba's. Thank you.