



### About the Author:

Scott Crane is the program director for Menucha Retreat and Conference Center, in Corbett, Oregon. He is a Certified Christian Educator in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and has written outdoor ministry curriculum for the National Council of Churches. He enjoys being a guest preacher, singing in choirs, working with children and adults (especially in the outdoors) and has written several as-of-yet unpublished children's stories and poetry collections. To learn how to write WordPress web pages, he recently started a blog of his own reflections, encouragement, inspiration, poetry and conversation-starters. You can read these at <http://scottrick.wordpress.com>. One of his several interests is the point of application between theological reflection and environmental stewardship.



**On Easter Sunday, 2010 Scott Crane had the opportunity to give a sermon at the sunrise service at Menucha. The Menucha Rose Garden Labyrinth figured heavily into the crafting of his message. Following is the text of Scott's Easter sermon.**

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts together be acceptable to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Recently I took my afternoon walk down along the Rim Trail here at Menucha. It winds along the bluff – almost to the edge of the cliff upon which we sit, over-looking the Columbia River hundreds of feet below.

It is a distinct pleasure to walk Menucha's trails in the early spring when the understory and the canopy are not yet leafed out. Glimpses of that which is ordinarily obscured by leaf and twig are seen: Peek-a-boo views up and down the river, on eye-level the tops of snags whose roots cling to the cliffs below, or spring wild flowers on the forest floor, opening petals to the early season sun in their own brief life of glory before they fade and die to wait for their own resurrection.

Moved in my spirit to go walk the labyrinth, I took the trail that direction to pray and listen to what might be waiting for me. As I stepped down into the protected dell where the labyrinth sits cupped by rose gardens, still sleeping in early spring, suddenly the wind seemed slightly removed. Even with wind whistling overhead, the wan spring sun was almost warm so I took off my coat. Preparing myself, I stepped into the labyrinth and began my journey....

Part of the mystery and part of the healing power of prayerfully walking a labyrinth is framing the intent of your journey. This art of pilgrimage can take many forms. One way of walking the labyrinth in prayer is to intentionally step into the experience using an ancient three-fold path of spiritual reflection. I chose to make my first stage a questing-framing my thoughts and feelings into a question, and giving it up in prayer to God.

This part of the walk lasts from the entrance of the labyrinth all the way along the ever-turning path to the middle. When reaching the middle, the next stage begins. This is often called the Illumination stage. Unlike the beginning, where one is always moving, ever—turning towards the middle, in the center one is still; standing in the middle and being open to the Spirit of God and to any message that may come. The questions cease. The mind is expectant. The way of the heart is opened and our own spirit is readied to receive.

Sometimes, this is the place where profound insights strike at the core of who we are, and sometimes it is a place that seems not to have anything for us right now other than a place to rest along the journey-which sometimes is a message unto itself. This time, I was moved to look up and around at all my surroundings; and as I began to listen to what I saw, a message began to make itself known.

First, I gazed up to the north-the direction in our labyrinth one faces first upon entering the center. As I looked off up a set of stone steps through an arch of tree limbs into the distance, the message began: North is one of the two cardinal directions associated with middle life. The other direction being the south. In this world view, East represents birth and new life; and the west represents the end of life.

All these thoughts came to me as I stood gazing into the north, up stone steps along a forest path leading into the horizon of an early spring sky. So I turned to the south, to see if God's message had more to unfold to me. This time, it did. As I gazed southward from the center of the labyrinth, two more sets of stone steps led up and away. I stood considering the metaphor of life, and where I am now in my own journey, walking the ground between young adulthood and adulthood – and let that message sink in – reminding me that all of us must grow and change, it is our nature to do so even if we would wish to linger longer in one stage or another.

I turned toward the east and gazed through the straight tunnel arbor of our roses growing up their metal pipe trellises - just beginning to show signs of leaf buds immersing from a long winter sleep. Sure enough, God's message was still unfolding – like a rose bud one petal at a time. As I stood gazing through to the east, more of the message hit home. The view symbolized for me my beginning. From birth to my current moment, that was the part of my life that is now past. The young adulthood I have been holding onto is gone. It is time to move on.

Reluctantly, I turned to face the west. Immediately, two things struck me in quick succession. First, the Arbor tunnel I looked through this time stretched on

much farther and curved out of sight down a forest pathway. Secondly, on down this path – still made of the pipe work that used to hold climbing roses long since succumbed to shaded conditions – there was a curious bulge where three rungs of metal piping cupped themselves around a bit of ground almost doubly as wide as the original path.

Another petal in the message of the metaphor unfolded itself into my mind. This really IS where I am in life! I am just a few steps in my journey away from where life normally leads – sometime in the near future I should expect my life to broaden and a family of more than two begin to form. For a brief span of life before returning to a path for two, there will be a time to raise children and let them go to make their own way in the world. That time of childrearing must be near, then, as I gazed up that path and thought about my initial question from the beginning of my labyrinthine prayer walk.

Was this, then, the message for me this day? Have I stood in the middle long enough to hear the message for which today I was moved to walk the labyrinth in prayer?

The third stage of the three-fold path is often termed “Union.” It is also a “Returning.” This part of the journey comprises walking from the center back along the path you came in, taking each turn in reverse until you step over the threshold from this sacred time and space back into ordinary time and space again; hopefully changed. As you walk the path back out, you are walking with God back into the world, integrating whatever message or messages you received into the next steps of your journey in life.

All this metaphor of the journey of life is fine and good, but you may be wondering, “what does this have to do with the message of Easter?” Ah, I’m glad you asked! This same three-fold path of spiritual reflection, this same process - although unbeknownst to the disciples - was what occurred to those on the Emmaus Road. The two disciples were walking their journey, discussing and wondering about all that had happened to them. What did it all mean that Christ, their teacher, their Lord, had been died and buried? And what did it mean that

the women reported he had been raised on this the third day and was going before them? And there, in their journey and in the midst of their questions, Jesus came. He did not reveal himself at first, *but he walked with them along the way!* Isn't that what usually happens in the life of faith? Our 20-20 hindsight often reveals to us where Jesus walked with us, even when we knew him not. When the disciples reached their destination, they invited Jesus to stay with them – this is the first stage, the walking of the labyrinth to the center. At their destination, He enters in, breaks bread with them, and their eyes are opened. This is their center, the second stage of the three-fold path. This was their resting and receiving illumination! Then when their eyes are opened, they get up and travel back the way they came. In this their third stage, all that they experienced they began reintegrating into what their life and purpose would become. When they reach their comrades back in Jerusalem, they tell all they have seen and learned, and their life begins anew.

Return with me for a moment to our labyrinth. I do not know if my life's journey and message is a metaphor for your own. That is for you to decide. And I do not know if the living metaphor of my life is also a metaphor for the Church as a whole where it stands today in its long life. But I do know this: Today is Easter! Today marks a new beginning! Just as the sun rises in the east, just as Christ – who lived, died, was buried and sealed in a tomb – rose again from the dead to new life, so too do we mirror this dying and rising. Jesus Christ rose from the dead and changed the world. Each one of us is a mirror given over to reflecting the life and way of Christ' living, dying, and rising. Today, as the sun rises, as Christ rises and as you rise – what will you do in response to this gift of grace?

For whosoever of us is in Christ is a new creation. The old is dead and gone. The new has come! You have your journey before you. Live it, and live Christ. May all glory in heaven and on earth and under the earth be unto the One who lived, who died, who rose again; even Him who is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Alleluia, Amen!