

d then examining it, you can either call it a keeper because it passed the test, discard it, or adjust it.” We can work toward lifelong spiritual growth no matter our age. That’s part of what we are called to do as disciples of Jesus Christ—learn and grow, challenge and discover those beliefs that can ground us as God is the Ground of our Being. McLaren explains that in his view there are four stages of faith formation. The First Stage is Simplicity—everything is black and white, simple and easy. Stage Two is Complexity where you focus on techniques for finding the truth. Stage Three is Perplexity where you become disillusioned in your learning, you doubt all authority figures and absolutes, everything is relative and hazy.

Stage Four is Humility where in his words, “You come to terms with your limitations, and you learn to live with mystery, not as a cop-out, but as an honest realization that only God understands everything. You carry out of stage four a shorter list of tested and cherished beliefs that you base your life on.” This process continues throughout our lifetimes. None of us need to achieve Stage Four and just stay there. That actually isn’t a healthy place to be if we want to stretch our minds and hearts. To figure out how we’re supposed to be living our lives. To figure out where God is calling us to go or the needs of the community God needs us to address—for we are the hands and feet of Christ. Because how do we deal with that co-worker we don’t like very much or handle your children doing things that drives you crazy? Or deal with the frustration that comes with being so busy that you’re not spending quality time with those you love? Or handle a setback in your health? Or whatever it is that you encounter that’s just plain hard to deal with? Doubt is essential for faith formation. Though it’s hard to cling to doubt in those moments when we need to know that God loves us and walks beside us on our roads to Emmaus and that we’re part of a faith community that walks beside us too.

Our challenge in the days and years ahead is to keep engaged and wrestling with God until we have that blessing! As Brian McLaren says we can have that “shorter list of tested and cherished beliefs that you base your life on.” With these tried and true beliefs we are onto something transformative as people of faith. We take those beliefs and we go beyond these walls and put them into practice out in the world.

In Bible Study, adult education classes, and hearing your insights after worship it’s been a joy to witness Pilgrims discovering cherished beliefs that help you serve God and the people of God with gladness. Beliefs that help you when the going gets inevitably rough in life. I’m grateful to have worked alongside staff members as we supported one another on our respective journeys. There’s been genuine companionship throughout these six years among our incredible church staff—we even had our own version of the Last Supper at Sweet Cheeks BBQ in Boston to celebrate our time together. And though I still refuse to answer this last Confirmation class’s question of if they were my favorite Confirmation class or not—journeying with our bright and hilarious high school students has been an honor. And remember the story of the Prodigal Son, will you please, past Confirmands? (Found in Luke 15!) That God will come running out to meet you no matter what you may have done or left undone in your life.

At the end of the day, when those disciples were walking alongside this person on the road to Emmaus (who they didn’t even recognize as Jesus yet) there came a point where he began interpreting scripture. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he shared his wisdom. The disciples kept walking, listening. Their hearts were part of the conversation. They come near the village and Jesus walked ahead as if he was continuing on his own journey. But they stop and ask him to stay because it’s almost evening. The disciples didn’t just learn about the role of the Messiah in scripture and stop there, happy for the knowledge they gained and ready to get on with their lives. Instead, they put their faith into action even as they were grieving the loss of their teacher and friend. Taking that knowledge they gained from Jesus they immediately showed compassion. Don’t go ahead. Come inside and get off the road—then continue on your journey. And after that hospitality is extended, after Jesus accepts that compassion, they sit down to the table and break bread and see Jesus for who he is. He

disappears. We can take that literally, metaphorically, not really know what to make of it. The point is compassion—hospitality shown, bread blessed and broken and shared around the table. For Jesus is always meeting us where we are, loving us into wholeness, and inviting us to embody compassion on the journey. May it be so with us—always. Amen.