Faith Journey -- Libby Rollins

I don’t remember a time when the church wasn’t part of my life. More specifically, the Presbyterian Church. With both parents being raised Presbyterian, my dad in Pittsburgh, PA and my mother in Birmingham, AL, and both grandfathers being ordained elders, I guess you’d say the Presbyterian church is literally in my blood.

My parents did the typical young adult thing and did not actively participate in church as newlyweds and young adults. However, after having three daughters, they looked at each other and said “we have to get these girls baptized!” So they returned to my mother’s childhood congregation, for one Sunday only, and I was baptized at age four, alongside my younger twin sisters, at South Highland Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL. A few years later, when I was six, my parents made the decision to join a congregation, and Shades Valley Presbyterian became my church home.

My earliest memory of that congregation was my first day in Sunday School. The lesson that day was learning the Doxology. Following Sunday School we dropped my younger sisters in the nursery, this colorful, magical world full of toys and welcoming faces, and I was taken up to the sanctuary for “big church,” as that was the place for first-graders. The pews were hard. The room cavernous. Not exactly the setting I had just seen downstairs where my sisters were. I’m sure I fidgeted and complained, and felt very out of place. But near the end, as the congregation rose to their feet, I heard a familiar tune, could remember a few of the lines of the song I was taught earlier that morning, and for a fleeting moment, felt like I belonged, like I was in the right place.

We were the family that was there every Sunday, every Wednesday, and for every special event. I sang in choirs, played bells, participated in youth group, served on Youth Council, went on retreats and mission trips, and made church events a priority on my calendar. It was through these events and the people who led them and shared in them with me that I began to understood the deep love of God and the place of Christ in my life. Church, faith, and God were central to my understanding of who I was.

I attended Presbyterian College in Clinton, SC, where I majored in Christian Education. Following graduation, I entered Columbia Seminary, although not quite sure I was in the right place. I knew I was a good student and wanted to learn more about faith, God, and the church, but I also knew I would NEVER be a pastor. Clearly God had other plans. In seminary I met David, and we were married shortly after graduation.

Throughout the years God has called us to various places – Georgia, Alabama, Virgina, and now Florida, and God has always opened my ears to new possibilities. I stumbled into interim ministry on a fluke, falling in love with an exciting church who needed an interim and wanting to partner with them regardless of the role. I honestly thought I’d do that for a year or so and then get a “real job.” But over the past twenty-six years, the call of God and the Holy Spirit have continually led me to congregations in transition. I now understand transitional ministry is a real job, having served 13 congregations along the journey. I enjoy the process of leaning into the goodness of God and seeing where he leads a congregation if they simply have the courage to follow.

Maybe it’s easy for me to encourage congregations to lean into the goodness of God, because I repeatedly find myself relying on that as a personal strategy. Life is messy and when I’m faced with the messy, painful times, like settling into a new context, leaving a congregation I love without knowing what comes next, carrying my six-week old son to a pediatric cardiologist, or watching my mother battle Alzheimer’s, I find myself saying, “God has a long history of taking care of me, and I trust that will continue.” I’m continually thankful I’m able to lean on all the things the church has taught me, from my earliest memories through yesterday, about the love of God and the grace of Jesus Christ.