



April 21, 2025

As you read this, another Lent will have passed, but I wrote this during Lent.

I began thinking about Lent while listening to Kate Bowler's podcast, "Everything Happens." Kate is an associate professor at Duke Divinity School, and I enjoyed listening to what Kate and her guest had to say about Lent as I started my travels to Vietnam and Cambodia on Ash Wednesday. In the podcast, I heard Kate say that Lent is "...a time to walk with what is." So I took this phrase with me on our trip.

After studying up for the trip by watching Ken Burns' documentary on the Vietnam War and reading books by Vietnamese and Cambodian people, I wanted to, and I did, apologize to one of our guides, Phuong. I felt great sorrow. Such atrocities. So much to lament.

I talked with Phuong after visiting sights from the war: the Cu Chi Tunnels, the War Remnants Museum, and the buildings where the helicopters landed and filled up with people waiting to escape on the day Saigon fell. I asked Phuong how people felt about Americans, expecting him to say that we shouldn't have come or that we left too early. What I heard him say was that it is seen as good and bad. Good and bad. It's complicated.

As we continued to travel in Cambodia, and in the central and north of Vietnam, we met many open, caring, beautiful, resilient people. They greeted us warmly, shared their lives with us. We watched as local people rode scooters around the crowded cities and gathered in the evenings to eat and talk. This was quite a different scene than what we saw in the Ken Burns documentary.

Along the way I picked up a book by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet and peace activist. His writings showed me, from another culture entirely, how to "...walk with what is." I slowed my breath, listened, observed another part of God's earth, another group of God's people.

After the trip, still attempting to walk with what is, I returned to cold cloudy weather in Benzie County, chaos in our country, and the beauty of being home. On our first Sunday back at St. Andrews, the Lenten wreath reading included, "Quiet your heart and be in the moment...whether it be joy or sadness, gratitude, anger or anxiety, let it come forward. Listen for God."

As I write this, the sun is shining. The moon is full. Holy Week begins. Easter is still coming.

Let's continue to walk together with what is, as Jesus did, listening and watching for the light of God.

~Written by Barb Perry

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