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## **Those With Whom We Journeyed**

**By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.**

My wife, Patty, just celebrated a big milestone, the 20th anniversary of her ordination to the Priesthood. I took her out to dinner, and I suggested it might be fun to reminisce about people who stood out in her memory from all of the places where she has served.

We laughed about particularly colorful characters, we paused when we mentioned people no longer living, and we were moved when we mentioned people who had inspired her, supported her, or both. She then encouraged me do the same.

What we were doing went well beyond observing an anniversary. We were taking a few moments to look back and, in awe and wonder, to remember and name some of the folks with whom we had been privileged to worship and pray, to share coffee and questions, to celebrate, and to walk the walk that is the Christian journey.

One aspect that stood out for me among the people we mentioned was the sense of joy that so many of them exuded. This was not a Pollyanna-joy, a joy out of touch, or an air of perpetual ease and happiness. Indeed, this spirit of deep joy often emanated from those who had experienced much suffering and many personal challenges. It was joy born out of a profound sense that, in spite of all of that, God is still in control and things are moving towards a meaningful conclusion.

These grounded-in-joy individuals seemed to echo the prayerful words of medieval Christian mystic and theologian Dame Julian of Norwich, who lived during the devastating time of the Black Death. She prayed these words, “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

Her message does not ignore misfortune, sickness, and evil. But she leads us to see joy and trust in the midst of hardship, and even death. This joy, in spite of whatever life might throw at us, is one of the best tools for evangelism we could ever have.

Imagine those people who have walked through many a challenge and emerged with observable *bona fides*, or we might say “street cred,” and still point towards their faith and their resolute belief in God, regardless of the present moment and all they have experienced. That witness can have a deep impact upon other people.

I am reminded of the well-known and inspiring words of St. Paul from his magisterial eighth chapter to the Romans: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (verse 18). And, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (verse 28).

Have you named some of heroes and mentors in the faith who have aided your journey? Or at least some vividly colorful characters who effused joy and helped you carry on the walk? Maybe it is time.

And maybe it is also time to thank God for those folks who might have seemed random in our journey, but who have clearly helped to shape and form us and bring us to this point. I imagine there are several right among us at Immanuel. What a gift that would be.