

**Just Being: Reflections on a 48 Hours  
Without Technology Retreat at Mercy Center  
by Melinda Athey**

I sit with my dinner in the silent dining room. All alone, I eat and listen. Part of an Anthony Machado Poem is running through my head:

*I dreamed ... I had a beehive  
here inside my heart.  
And the golden bees  
were making white combs  
and sweet honey  
from my old failures.*

I arrived at Mercy Center on the beginning afternoon of my 48-hour retreat full of curiosity. I was ready to map out my two days of no use of technology – just two days of quiet and no interruptions. I brought packages, parcels, luggage and a bag of books. I placed all my bundles in my teeny, tidy room and looked around. I noticed the only decoration - a picture on the wall of a woman sitting on her bed with the Divine Light visiting her. What a disappointment, I thought to myself. The picture didn't resonate with me – how can God come to her? She isn't really doing much.

I decided to walk the labyrinth before I got down to busying myself with all the copious projects and books I had lugged with me. I purposefully set out.

On my mission to “walk the labyrinth” I am reminded of something. Recently my kids spent the week at elementary school learning about bees. They did a “bee unit.” I think about how I am making a “bee-line” for the labyrinth. I always thought that this meant to go straight towards something - to not stop or tarry; to go directly to the object of the destination. To make a “bee-line.”

But something funny happened on the way to the labyrinth. I started to think about how bees act when they are out gathering pollen to make into honey. They don't make a beeline. They hover and hop and investigate. They return and tell their fellow hive mates where the best flowers and best source of pollen may be growing, ripening, waiting.

Yet my determined steps clumped quickly on, and I started the maze. As I rapidly conquered the path, I found my pace slowing. At the end of walking the path, I returned leisurely to my room thinking about what brought me to Mercy Center on this weekend. I think about how badly I wanted a break from all that encompasses my life. I think about the fast pace of Silicon Valley where I live and work. I remind myself of all the things on my “to do list” that I cannot access since I can't use my phone or

computer. I realize that I can't be distracted by a search on the internet about these thoughts I am having about bees.

As the weekend, hours and moments unfold I begin to find the slow rhythm of my own pace. Like a bee, I read a little, pause, write a thought down, read a little, go for a walk. All the while resting, knowing that there was no one who would need me. No interruption unless I allowed it.

I quietly listened as I read, walked or ate in silence. I could hear distant chatter but cherished the silence. For in this quiet I could hear the thoughts of my heart surfacing... as if they were coming up for air, and then diving back down. The silence became sacred to me. It helped me and was a friend in the kindest sense of the word.

Like the bees feeding the hive of my heart, I didn't seek out conversation, but it seemed to find me. I spoke briefly with several people who I met by chance. I found it interesting how they would ask a question or make a comment that set my heart further on the path. I rested and walked -- all the while listening to hear the still small voice that moved mighty within me.

I came on retreat thinking I would read my stack of text books. I came with my tool boxes, bags, parcels and suitcase. But I found what really needed tending were the bags and suitcases in my heart and the deep questions they hold.

*What do I need to let go of? What do I really need to live the life set before me? What will help me on this path? How do I continue to listen and hear what it has to say to me?*

As I wandered the grounds, watching the birds, seeing a fox, pondering the 500 year-old oaks, it came to me that the spirit is like those bees. I felt the spirit attending to my heart and soul in the same way. In the quiet, soft sound of life without a phone, iPod, computer, I am allowed to rest and let the spirit do the work in my heart that it so desperately cries out for. That deep work of the spirit that I desire, but I don't allow since I think I should live my life like a bee going in the bee-line.

48 hours of quiet invited the opening up of my spirit and heart. I didn't accomplish all the projects and reading I planned. I didn't accomplish anything. Instead, this quiet let the spirit have it's way with me -- to knit together the broken things, reaffirm the good things, and allow me to feel loved in a way that I can only describe as divine. It was almost like the picture in my teeny room of the woman sitting on the bed with the light of the divine next to her. Bathed in the light of Love -- simply being.