

Never have I studied so much for something as I did this past year for pregnancy, labor and delivery. I saw the videos, bought all the books, and dragged my husband (willingly) to the hospital's childbirth education classes. And then there was the Internet. I was relentless. MayoClinic.com. BabyCenter.com. Childbirth.org. I subscribed to weekly updates on my pregnancy, my baby's development and my pre-infant shopping needs. If I could have sat for a qualifying exam, Harvard would have offered me thousands of dollars. (Ms. Rosencrans, you have received the highest score possible on the PBLAT – the Pregnancy, Birth and Labor Aptitude Test. Please accept this \$50,000 scholarship as a token of our admiration.)

But, as my many knowing friends wisely told me, knowing about pregnancy, labor and delivery and actually *experiencing* it were two different worlds. Pregnancy was a breeze. Labor and delivery hurt. A lot. But I really did forget all about it (almost) once the doctor placed Riley on my chest. Here was the most beautiful little boy in the world, another human being who had been knit together inside my body without much direct involvement from me, who was now *completely* dependent on us for life in this outside world. And we, though thoroughly exhausted and sore after 36 hours, loved him immediately. So where was that parenting manual?

With this experience in mind, I've chuckled as I've read Parker Palmer's discussion of knowing. "We do not learn best by memorizing facts about the subject," he wrote in the preface (p. xvii). "Because reality is communal, we learn best by interacting with it." No kidding.

But I realize that to many people, in many occupations, knowledge is not necessarily a relationship. In fact, knowledge, which the world likes to think of as objective information about a subject, often serves to sever relationships or prevent them from happening in the first place. And Palmer points this out throughout his book. The dilemma he describes seems to be the one summed up by all those adages about experience being the best teacher or necessity being the mother of invention, or that you don't really know until it happens to you. From time to time, we see this lesson as a plot line. Remember "Regarding Henry?" In this 1991 movie, Harrison Ford plays a cruel, ruthless corporate attorney who is transformed by a shot to the head and resulting coma into a good-natured, innocent person. As Henry re-connects with his wife and daughter, he learns how horribly he treated people in his previous life. But then the movie also seems to

conclude that only evil, ruthless people can be successful corporate lawyers and those who care about relationships are too soft and don't deserve the money anyway.

Palmer's book is a good reminder of the difference between knowing with one's head and knowing with one's whole being. Studying for childbirth was head knowledge. Giving birth involved my total being. The latter is the kind of knowledge that involves experience and relationships, and, I would suggest, it is the kind of knowledge that American culture in particular deems too expensive, too dangerous, to be the norm. If, as Palmer writes, "truth involves entering a relationship with someone or something genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately bound" (p. 31), then we will be bound to that truth and we will be responsible to it. Head knowledge is much easier – to teach, to learn, to ignore.

Getting to my thoughts on Christian education here invokes the writings of Madeleine L'Engle. I grew up Lutheran, went to Sunday School and confirmation. I'm sure I memorized Luther's Small Catechism. But as a child, I truly received my Christian education through my relationships with my parents, grandparents and good friends – and through the writings of Madeleine L'Engle. Sunday School was a boring obligation which I fulfilled in order not to have an all-out screaming argument with my parents on Sunday mornings. L'Engle intrigued me long before I realized that she was a "Christian" writer (a title that she dislikes). I can't remember my official Sunday School teachers or much from my years of formal religious education, though I'm sure it was well-intentioned. What has stuck with me has been the questing: The after-church discussions over coffee and caramel rolls with the Smith family, arguing about the sermon with my mom, or reading, over and over, L'Engle's stories.

L'Engle wrestles, too, with the difference between knowing and knowing. In her 1962 book, "A Wrinkle In Time," 14-year-old Meg Murry finds herself on a planet with hairy creatures who have no eyes. Meg tries to explain to one what it means to see.

Perplexity came to her from the beast. "What is this dark? What is this light? We do not understand. Your father and the boy, Calvin, have asked us this, too. They say that it is night now on our planet, and that they cannot see. They have told us that our atmosphere is what they call opaque, so that the stars are not visible, and then they were surprised that we know stars, that we know their music and the movements of their dance far better than beings like you who spend hours studying them through what you call telescopes. We do not understand what this means, *to see.*"

"Well, it's what things look like," Meg said helplessly.

"We do not know what things *look* like, as you say," the beast said. "We know what things *are* like. It must be a very limiting thing, this seeing."

All education involves knowledge and the ability to encounter and retain information about something, whether it is about ourselves or other than ourselves. Religious education is no different – even though it involves this amorphous thing called faith and focuses on this wildly improbable person called Christ. But to move from knowing to the kind of knowing that Palmer talks about involves something more than the presentation of information. As L’Engle might say, it involves drawing a line between the knowledge and the knower.

So, as I think about Christian education, what is the knowledge to be known? How would a Sunday School teacher, an adult forum leader, an ordinary person move from getting the facts about the Bible or the theology at hand into a relationship of knowing? It seems to me that one would have to “do” Christianity as well as teach about it – and that would probably mean throwing out the coloring sheets and flash cards. I think there are some for whom creating a welcoming, bounded space for learning is a natural event. As wonderful as I think Palmer’s ideas are, I also think that shifting to his vision will be difficult and resisted by churches who are already desperate to find any warm body for their Sunday School rooms. On the other hand, I don’t think much teaching is done in those situations. The other dilemma is that of knowledge. Palmer talks about the best teachers as those who love their subject, who are in relationship with that which they want their students to discover. But how does one – and can one -- expect religious educators, particularly volunteers, to meet some level of expertise or faith maturity?

Palmer writes: “In light of the incarnation, the world is no longer an object to be manipulated and owned. Instead it is a community of persons, and knowing its truth means recovering the bonds of personhood and community that have been lost between us.” (p.65) It is a beautiful vision – and a true one. There is a difference between knowing and knowing – and I think it involves the other knowing you as you, in turn, try to know the other. And God knows both. I know lots of things. And I see all of my life, all of my educational opportunities as part of my Christian or “religious” education because, if truth is relationship, then to me there is no distinction between types of education because me, my being, is involved in all of them.

Reading about having a child and actually having a child, this little boy, are two different worlds. Discussing what it must be like to breast feed or worry about a blood-tinged diaper is vastly different than actually doing it. The knowledge is the same but the knowing is different. So it is with truly being in relationship with God. And what an interesting challenge.