

ARE WE THERE YET?

Pilgrimage in the Season of Lent

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Foreword



Since the day we left Eden, the people of God have been trying to make our way back to the place we most deeply belong—to the literal dust of our making and the unfathomably deep heart of God. The travels and travails we witness throughout the Bible and see most clearly in the life of Jesus bring to mind a quote from spiritual activist and writer Ram Dass: “We’re all just walking each other home.” And so it is with the idea of pilgrimage. Whether we are following the yellow arrows that mark the *Camino*, the white blazes that wend their way from Alabama to Maine on the Appalachian Trail, or simply obeying the sighs and signs of the Holy Spirit’s leading, somewhere along our journey we will wonder, “Are we there yet?” Like God whispering to Elijah on the mountain, we will eventually come to realize that the journey—the wrestling and the wandering—is the real flesh and blood of our endeavor.

Pilgrims come in all shapes and sizes, as do the journeys we set for ourselves. The bald fact of pilgrimage is this: The furthest distance we will travel is the eighteen inches between our brains and our hearts. Every pilgrim is radically changed by the experience. We analyze our personal theologies,

relationships, and habits—and even our relationship to time itself. The pilgrims who have contributed to this Lenten devotional share this truth of transformation in the stories of their journeys.

Whether you are planning a trip of your own or traveling through your memories and life experiences during this holy season, we invite you to join us as we make our way toward Jerusalem with Jesus. On the way, we will walk the *Camino* in Spain, visit Marian shrines in England and Wisconsin, bear witness to the pain of historic lynching sites in the American South, be reunited with beloved family members in India, hold hands around a prayer circle in a mental hospital, and scale Appalachian peaks. Through our journeys, may we be open to the miracles of love and life and awestruck by the One who is both our journey and our destination.

With prayers for a holy Lent,

Rachel Jones

Associate Editor, Forward Movement

Introduction

Wandering and Welcome



Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1-3

The Journey



In 2013, I walked the *Camino Frances* (the French Way) as part a sabbatical. The *Camino de Santiago* (the Way of Saint James) is an ancient route leading to the cathedral city of Santiago, Spain, the legendary resting place of the relics of James the Greater (one of the sons of Zebedee). The *Camino Frances* begins in France and links up with the Spanish portion of the road just over the Pyrenees Mountains.

Marek Zabriskie

Wandering and Welcome

The pilgrim's path is a journey that transforms our inner being through hospitality, holy places, and the holy bearers of God's grace we meet along the way.

There are places of holiness all over the earth where humans have experienced the presence of God. When we travel to them, we become pilgrims. We are absorbed into the holiness of these places, and we are transformed by these liminal sites. Pilgrimage plays a major role in most of the world's major religions. Jews travel around the world to set foot on Mount Moriah. Muslims are required to make at least one hajj to Mecca. Hindus travel to Varanasi and Benares. Buddhists trek across the Himalayas to the holy city of Lhasa, Tibet. Christians journey to Jerusalem, Rome, Ephesus, Lourdes, Canterbury, Fatima, Mexico City, Walsingham, and Chimayo, among other pilgrimage sites.

Pilgrims challenge their minds and bodies to go beyond comfortable boundaries and familiar settings, making arduous trips across land and sea, trekking through forests, traversing rivers and ascending hills, drawn toward the spiritual energy of holy sites. The lives they live on their journey are transformed by prayer and learning, evenings shared with old and new friends, the formation of deep relationships, and countless moments of grace. Pilgrims walk in the open

air, exposed to the elements, and they enjoy simple gifts like a good meal eaten with fellow travelers. Forests, fields, and watersheds become lifelong bosom friends, and the creative heart of God is revealed in the confluence of earth, air, and water. Pilgrims learn, as did that famous walker Saint Francis, that every bird has a sermon to sing to the glory of God.

During the Middle Ages, Christians made pilgrimage primarily to three sites: Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago. Today, those sites are still popular places to journey, but in a world of easy travel, other sites have also become holy destinations—from Sepphoris to Sheboygan. The idea of pilgrimage has always been part of the Christian experience, since the earliest days of retracing Jesus' last steps on the *Via Dolorosa*. Since the dawn of affordable air travel and the booming tourist business, the idea of physical pilgrimage has become a more realistic discipline for many of the faithful.

My journey along the *Camino* altered how I lead my life, see things around me, and carry out my ministry. Walking the *Camino* taught me the value of moving through life at a slower pace. I was blessed to share great conversations with many people who may never darken the door of a church but have a strong spiritual capacity. I came to understand how little we need to be deeply satisfied and joyful.

More than anything else, walking the *Camino* taught me that everyone is on a journey, and each journey is different. Every person we meet along our journey has gifts to offer us, if we

will keep our eyes and ears open and receptive. Likewise, we have something to offer to every person we meet, if we are willing to listen and be kind.

Teach us, O Lord, not to hold onto life too tightly, but lightly, gently, and gracefully. Teach us that significance and meaning in life come from the conversations we share along the journey with fellow travelers. Teach us to walk as pilgrims, traveling by faith, being open to surprise, receiving the gifts that you and others seek to offer us along the way. Transform and transfigure us as we travel. Amen.