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Cross Currents

A Journal of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church



PILGRIMAGE

CrossCurrents is written by clergy and laypersons of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, with the purpose of aiding parishioners in reflection on the meaning of faith in light of contemporary life. Copies may be obtained at the church, on our website, or by mail on request.

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PILGRIMAGE



Pilgrimage

“When that Aprilis, with his showers swoot,
The drought of March hath pierced to the root,
 And bathed every vein in such licour,
 Of which virtue engender’ d is the flower;
When Zephyrus eke with his swoote breath
Inspired hath in every holt and heath
 The tender croppes, and the younge sun
 Hath in the Ram his halfe course yrun,
 And smalle fowles make melody,
 That sleepen all the night with open eye,
(So pricketh them nature in their corages);
Then longe folk to go on pilgrimages....”¹

Who can resist the urge to quote Chaucer when speaking of pilgrimage? Chaucer begins his famous collection of tales told by Canterbury pilgrims by evoking the image of the awakening of spring. And, while some of the pilgrims’ tales are of a less than pious nature, the overall theme of pilgrimage still evokes the meaning of spring — an awakening of new life, renewed life, freshened hope and faith.

As several of our writers point out, the urge to visit holy places is an old and widespread desire, probably predating written history. In the Bible, the early destination is the promised land (or is it the return to Eden?), and later Jerusalem. Jesus himself, as well as his parents and his forebears, journeyed to Jerusalem, and it remains a destination of pilgrims to this day. For Europeans and others, it was such a desired destination that many wars were fought for access and possession, and so it remains today. When the long journey to Jerusalem was not possible, Europeans visited closer holy sites: Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and even Canterbury, to name just a few. For Muslims the millions that visit Mecca and for Hindus the throngs that visit the Ganges testify to the universal urge all religious and sometimes unreligious humans seem to feel toward pilgrimage.

Our writers in this issue, pilgrims all, are a varied group, just as Chaucer's pilgrims were. They vary in age and occupations from priest to student, from later life to young people just beginning their lives' journeys. They write about a variety of destinations, from Jerusalem to California, or simply to within one's self. Their motivations, like Chaucer's pilgrims', are also mixed and varied, sometimes spiritual, sometimes intellectual, sometimes merely curious or adventurous.

We invite you to travel their roads with them, to read and meditate on your own forms of pilgrimage, past, present, and/or future. Welcome, pilgrim!

Notes:

¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales and Fairie Queene &c., &c., &c.*, ed D. Laing Purves (New York: W.W. Staves, 1870), 17

Pilgrimages Then and Now

By Charles Witke

Happy are the people whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way. –Psalm. 84

To write of pilgrimage at the beginning of the twenty-first century is to look back upon thousands of years of this human activity. Since time immemorial in all places of the world people have set out from where they live to go to another place, a special place, a place associated with the holy or the especially significant in some way. Pagans and Christians, Hindus and Muslims, Native Americans and Buddhists have all had their pilgrimage destinations. People want to go to the places where their great heroes have lived and died, whether that hero is Jesus or Shakespeare, St. James or Elvis Presley. Going to where someone significant lived and died or to where there is a special religious aura seems very human and very ancient.

Each pilgrim is typical of the age: motoring to Stratford-upon-Avon to view Shakespeare's house and so forth hasn't added a special word to English yet, but in early days people thought we might have gotten *saunter* from people sauntering to the *Sainte Terre*, the Holy Land, and *roam* from people roaming to Rome. English did derive *canter* from pilgrims cantering to Canterbury. Pilgrimage became quite a business in the later Middle Ages. For instance, Venice became a major port for transporting pilgrims (and crusaders) to the Near East and the Holy Land. Throughout Europe and the Near East lodging houses, inns, and caravanserais flourished for the benefit not only of commercial travelers, but also for the pilgrims in their midst.

Guide books were written for the benefit of visitors to specific cities and sites. Those for Rome of the later Middle Ages set forth the order in which the major basilicas were to be visited, the routes to each, hymns to be sung on the way, medical facilities, and lodgings arranged by nationality. We learn a great deal about the city from such sources.

It seems basic to human awareness that certain locales are closer to the divine immanence than others. For Christians, there are two motives for the selection of such places as goals of travel. First, the fact of the Incarnation accounts for the desire to visit places associated with the historical Jesus in Palestine and in Jerusalem, where he died on pilgrimage. Constantine built churches for some such places, like the Churches of the Holy Sepulchre and of the Resurrection.

Second, early Christian communities from the second century on venerated the tombs of heroes such as the martyr Polycarp. Their tombs, even if they contained only some bones raked from the ashes of the execution site, were holy places worthy of veneration and became goals of pilgrimage. The Roman practice of patronage in the political sphere obligated clients of a powerful patron to wait upon him regularly at his lavish urban house, and the practice was extended to the martyr as patron of a client parish church, cathedral or region, and the people there. Bishops went to great lengths to secure such relics for their see church rather than letting the martyrs' families keep them in a private setting. After all, money came into the church coffers, food sellers and lodging keepers benefited, and the bishop got a leg up on his fellows.

For example, the tomb of the Apostle Peter beneath the basilica of St. Peter in Rome is definitely identified through exacting archaeological work. If one can get permission to descend into the Roman cemetery beneath the church, it is possible to see scratched on the wall by the simple earth grave (at the poor peoples' end of the cemetery by the circus of Caligula) inscriptions in Greek such as: "Peter, we are here." "Peter, I have come to you." The visitors wanted to leave a record of their visit just as people do today when they carve their initials on a tree. I'll say some more about this site later.

Muslims have Mecca, Hindus have the Ganges, Shingon Buddhists have Mount Koya in Japan, and so on. People still visit Mt. Moriah where Abraham went with Isaac, and Mt. Sinai, the site of both Moses' burning bush and the giving of the Torah. While the specific motives for visiting such places vary, they seem pretty constant in one way: religious pilgrimages are either undertaken to obtain supernatural help, or as acts of penance, or for giving thanks. Let me comment on these three motives in regard to pilgrimage sites I have experienced.

First, supernatural help. Last year my wife Aileen Gatten and I made a long-awaited journey to Chaco Canyon in northwest New Mexico with an archaeologist. Chaco was a ceremonial center for a huge surrounding area of pre-Pueblo people in the centuries from around 850 to 1100 C.E. Vast structures of as many as 800 rooms contained lunar and solar observatories as well as religious sites. Annual visits seem to have constituted the central religious ceremonies. Trade was also carried out, and archaeologists have found shells from the California coast, and parrot feathers and macaw skeletons from Mexico and further south. And now New Age believers have identified Chaco Canyon as a site of "harmonic convergence" and attempt to carry out their activities there at certain times of the year to the chagrin of Native Americans and government conservators alike. We found a piece of modern turquoise clandestinely imbedded in some masonry.

Second, penance. In Rome, near its cathedral, St. John Lateran, there is the Sancta Sanctorum, a building with a collection of rather dubious items said to come from Jerusalem. They include the table of the Last Supper, as well as the staircase to Pilate's praetorium. As an act of penance the faithful climb this staircase on their knees. There is a large sign warning against pickpockets, whose activities perhaps augment the penitential burden. Once a taxi driver on the way there said his parents made him climb those stairs on his knees when he was a high school student because he had become "too friendly" with his teacher.

Third, thanksgiving. In 1985 we visited Mount Koya in Western Japan for the 1,150th anniversary of the death of Kukai in 835. Kukai was a Japanese monk who studied esoteric Buddhism in China, returned to Japan to found the Shingon school of Buddhism, and is credited with introducing a new way of writing Japanese, a syllabary. Thousands of pilgrims came for celebrations in thanksgiving for his teachings and cultural contributions to Japanese life. In addition to splendid ceremonies in various sub-temples, a novel touch was given by processions of Japanese ladies, the "altar guilds" of temples from all over Japan, playing tiny hand bells and singing Buddhist hymns. Kukai's mummified body sits (in deepest meditation, it is believed) in a hut behind the principal temple building. The clothes are changed annually, and once a distinguished professor of Japanese literature in Tokyo told us that he shook the hand of the monk who had recently freshened up the saint, and found a strong pleasant perfume on his hand.

What site has remained most vivid in my experience? It would have to be the site of Peter's tomb beneath the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican. Three visits over the years have done nothing to dim the impressions of both solemn grandeur and the simple tomb on which it all rests and also depends for its meaning. In the 1960s one descended from the nave of St. Peter's itself, using the small door under the tomb of Pope Alexander VII and passing under its huge, molting winged skeleton in gold and marble, which is shown surprising the pope kneeling in prayer: quite a dramatic way to enter the crypts below floor level.

Descending still further, one got down to below Constantine's fourth century church. Constantine spent huge amounts of money and effort to remove the roofs from ancient tombs that lined a street running from the low-lying Tiber up the Vatican hill. It was there that Peter was thought to have been buried after crucifixion by Nero in the circus of Caligula, which runs under the south side of the modern church. The builders of this first basilica went to great lengths to site the building above the street of tombs, moving immense amounts of earth and using the tombs as part of the foundation so as to situate

the altar over one simple grave below. These tombs were filled with earth, thus preserving them pretty much as they were in the fourth century. Chicken bones and egg shells were found, the remnants of offerings made by Constantine's work force to avoid pollution from disturbing the dead.

Many of these tombs have now been excavated and are quite spectacular, with plaster reliefs and colorful mosaics surrounding cremations and burials. Most are easily identified as belonging to pagan Romans, but some families had converts to Judaism, and at least one tomb has baffled the archaeologists. Getting down on all fours and inserting one's head through the opening made in the brick doorway, one could see a green and gold mosaic of a charioteer in a horse-drawn chariot with twelve rays coming from his crowned head: Elijah for a Jewish occupant? Hercules and the twelve labors? The Sun-God with the twelve months? Or Jesus with the twelve apostles? Maybe the owners were playing it safe.

Going further along the street of ancient tombs, moving east, one finally gets to why all this tremendous building activity was carried out: the remnants of a plain brick wall with red stucco and the stumps of two slender marble columns resting on a kind of shelf. This was thought to be the resting place of Peter, as the scratchings on the wall by pilgrims long before the fourth century attest. On top of this structure Constantine constructed the foundation for the main altar of his basilica, and modifications over the centuries preserved this spot, altar over altar, until today the huge seventeenth century altar in the present church discloses the spot for all to see.

These excavations were begun by Pope Pius XII when the Vatican archaeologists were cooped up there during the Second World War, and were finished under the pontificate of John XXIII, when I first saw them with a tiny group from the University of Rome. One was asked by the Vatican archaeologist to say an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory be to the Father before turning the corner to see the grave. No longer.

The bones in this simple earthen grave under the red wall were from a robust man of advanced age; interestingly, there were no feet or ankle bones, and it has been pointed out that Peter was, according to tradition, crucified upside down; not wanting to waste time, those later tidying up the execution site perhaps just chopped off his feet so his disciples could bury him at the poor folks' end of the adjacent cemetery.

To see the array of Plexiglas boxes containing these bones in an area just above their “find spot” was one of the most moving of experiences: scientific endeavor revealing and authenticating the earliest traditions of the church in Rome. One cannot any longer see them; Pope John Paul II asked that they not be shown. Skepticism about the authenticity of the relics has all but evaporated; the most recent study validating the find is by a brilliant historian, Timothy Barnes of the University of Toronto, whose credentials proudly include atheism.¹ The site now has its own entrance from outside the basilica, climate control has been installed, the tombs are glassed in, automatic doors open and close behind the very small groups and their archaeologist guide. But the scent of Roman damp earth, the warmth of the deep underground, and the literal weight of history over one’s head remain to make it an unforgettable pilgrimage for those willing to deal with the Vatican Archaeology Office and its cumbersome procedures.

In conclusion, perhaps it is a sign of our moving beyond the reasons for pilgrimage in the past to learn that a new factor, entertainment, may be gaining on proximity to the supernatural, penance and thanksgiving as reasons for pilgrimage. After all, there were entertainment aspects of pilgrimages all along, one can be sure. Think of Chaucer’s pilgrims on the way to Canterbury, and their vivid narrations, and the guides at pilgrimage sites such as St. Martin at Tours, where we are told by Gregory of Tours in the seventh century that the guides there explained the frescoes but also added more and more fantastic elements to the story of Martin’s life. And who would deny that shopping is entertainment? From silver badges for sale from the time of the death of Thomas Becket of Canterbury in 1170 to the shops around the Vatican (and even on the venerable roof of the basilica) selling everything from plastic figurines of saints to shower soap in the shape of John Paul II, called “Pope on a Rope”, shopping has been a part of pilgrimage. So, pilgrims are able to have fun as well as to partake of spiritual benefits of their journeys. Each of us is on a personal pilgrimage called our life, and from time to time an intentional journey to a special meaningful site can revivify us on the way.

Charles Witke is Professor Emeritus of Greek and Latin at the University of Michigan, a fellow of the American Academy of Rome, and Priest Associate at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Notes:

¹ Comments given at a lecture at the American Academy in Rome, 1998, unpublished. Further reading on the find can be found in John Evangelist Walsh, *The Bones of St. Peter: the Fascinating Account of the Search for the Apostle’s Body* (London: Victor Gallancz, 1983).



The Labyrinth: A Sacred Path

By Bernadette Pelland

What is a labyrinth? Is it the same as a maze? Although these terms are often used interchangeably there is a clear distinction between the two. Perhaps as a child, you visited a park which included a maze and delighted in getting lost, or you called out a challenge to a sibling to find you or a way out. This became a game; however, it is not likely that you encountered a labyrinth in your growing-up years.

A labyrinth is a structure that has only one path that meanders throughout the whole circle, leading into and back out of the center. The word for this feature is called “unicursal.” A maze, on the other hand, has many paths, making it easy to get lost within it. The labyrinth is related to the ellipse and the spiral, mirroring shapes found in nature that have been universally powerful and ancient symbols of wholeness and transformation.

Some authors do not make such a clear distinction between the labyrinth and the maze. Using these two terms alternately, J. E. Cirlot, in his *Dictionary of Symbols*, indicates that ancient writings mention five great labyrinthine structures: that of Egypt which Pliny located in Moeris; the two Cretan labyrinths of Conossus (or Gonossus, Knossus) and Gortyma; the Greek maze on the island of Lemnos; and the Etruscan at Clusium. Sketches of mazes have been discovered in Asia and Europe, conceived, perhaps, as a way to lure devils into them so they might never escape. Cirlot asserts that the maze, the abyss, and the whirlpool also have a dual aspect—one a “fall”—a loss of spirit and the need to seek out the way through the “Center” back to spirit, as well as a complementary image of heaven with the motions of astral bodies.¹ These designs have also been found on clay tablets, stone, and coins. The term “labyrinth” was first used by Herodotus in 484 B.C.E.²

Since all myths embody an inexhaustible source of image and story, so too does the account associated with the labyrinth. For Homer writes that “there is an island called Crete in the midst of a wine-dark sea, a fair land and rich, begirt with water, and therein are many men innumerable, and ninety cities.... And among these cities is the mighty city of Knossus, wherein Minos when he was nine years old began to rule, he who held converse with great Zeus....”³ The birth of a bastard child to Queen Pasiphae so enraged King Minos that he ordered Daedalus to build a prison for the beast-child, half man and half bull, whose name was Asterion or star (its shadow aspect?).⁴ Daedalus

was a designer and inventor; he is credited with blacksmithing, carpentry, armory for chariots and the infamous wax wings he made for his son, Icarus. At a loss for how to begin Asterion's prison, Daedalus saw the young princess, Ariadne, dancing the Dance of the Cranes on the beach. In the sand he noted the design of a high-walled seven-circuit labyrinth; he used this as the model of the high-walled seven-circuit structure he thought could be built as a prison in the depths of the palace, which could harbor the howling beast-child, the Minotaur, whose cries could be heard all over the island. So, about 3500 years ago the seven-circuit labyrinth came into being, now known as the Cretan labyrinth.⁵

A second problem for King Minos was the rising challenge from Athens for dominance of the Mediterranean. To assuage the appetite of his prisoner, and to maintain some balance of power with the Athenians, Minos demanded tribute from them—a yearly offering of seven maidens and seven young boys to be offered as sacrifice to the Minotaur. Shamed by this, the Athenian prince Theseus asked his father, King Aegeus, for permission to be included among the year's offerings. As fate would have it, when Theseus landed with his fellow victims, Princess Ariadne fell in love with him at first sight. Knowing his fate, she begged Daedalus to help her. Responding to her flattery, he gave her a ball of golden thread which she was to pass to Theseus as he entered the labyrinth, with instructions to unroll it until he reached the center. All the young people perished except Theseus, who took sword to the Minotaur and then followed the thread back to Ariadne; for Theseus returned her love. What saved Theseus was the gold thread or *clew* given him by Ariadne, which is the derivation of our word clue.⁶ For each of us in our own journey, this thin string is analogous to our intuitions, hunches, insights and dreams which we call upon, especially when we are in danger or in need of an escape, really or metaphorically. Is it not similar to the bread that Hansel and Gretel drop as they wend their way through the dark forest?

This is also the 'clew' which plays a similar role in *The Princess and the Goblin* by George MacDonald.⁷ The novel is the story of a princess sent away from her father's castle to safety during a war; while exploring the castle she comes upon an old woman spinning, who tells her she is her great-grandmother. To keep her safe and to provide guidance in face of challenges, the old woman gives the princess a ring to which she attaches an invisible thread. For the young girl who cannot see the thread and who must leave the ball with the grandmother, this is a disappointment. Lauren Artress discusses the symbolism of the princess's thread in her own book, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool*. Artress likens the princess's disappointment to our inner states as we walk the sacred paths of our lives, for it is

difficult to see and to believe that there is a Sacred Source of guidance within. But to hear and to follow demands a shift from the patterns in which we have been acculturated—patterns emphasizing God without, rules imposed by hierarchical structures, thinking we are trapped in a maze which can best be handled by left-brained “figuring it all out.” Artress encourages us to look anew at both religion and spirituality—one the outward form or container, the liturgy, the acts of worship that teach, praise and so on, the other the process of growth and maturation that happens within. They are, in reality, complementary elements of the Christian life. The labyrinth is only one of many spiritual tools that can deepen that spiritual maturity, and it does offer us a whole way of seeing. Walking a labyrinth helps us use the pattern-discerning gifts of our nature to discover what for each of us is a sense of call, as the often unfamiliar word “vocation” intends. It can help us to move from thinking about to pondering, as Mary did with the words of the angel, to a sense of the experience of the Sacred and of discerning the myriad ‘clues’ to become who we are meant to be. This process needs the support of the creative imagination.

Lauren Artress, canon priest of Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco, is the creator of Veriditas, the Labyrinth Project. She has been guiding persons in the rediscovery of the labyrinth as a tool for walking prayer for the last ten years. She and Allen Jones, rector of the cathedral, have been instrumental in recovering this ancient practice, which has disappeared for over 350 years. Early in their effort they made a pilgrimage to the twelve-circuit labyrinth in the floor of the nave of Chartres Cathedral in France. Although they had tried to contact personnel there beforehand, they were not successful, so on their visit they found the labyrinth covered with 256 chairs, which they decided to move without permission.⁸ That was the beginning of their involvement with the labyrinth. Subsequently they have had one embedded in an outside terrace at Grace Cathedral and one in the floor at the back of the cathedral. I was privileged to walk both and to attend a first-Friday evening ritual of walking the labyrinth in candlelight, accompanied by organ, guitar and vocal solos. It was a moving experience. Thousands walk these paths each year. Some groups, many of which have worked with Artress, have been instrumental in setting them up in hospitals, prisons, churches and in other public and private spaces. Ann Bell and I both participated in the Artress workshop given in Adrian. At the end of these pages is a list the labyrinths I know of in this area.

In her book, Artress provides information about the labyrinths in churches of the 12th century. Since the Crusades prevented people from making pilgrimages to Jeursalem, walking the labyrinth was a way of making a pilgrimage without leaving home. Chartres, however, differs from the Cretan labyrinth, in that it has 34 turns on the path going in to

the center, twelve concentric circles and four quadrants. There is a detailed description of the architectural structure of the labyrinth and its significance in Artress' book.⁹ Just as the number seven of the Cretan labyrinth is a sacred number in numerology, so too is the number twelve, the multiple of three representing heaven and four representing earth. At the center is a six-petaled rose—the sign of love and beauty and like the lotus, a sign of enlightenment. The testimony of many and perhaps your own experience indicates that as we circle the labyrinth we walk into a world that contains far more mystery than our literal minds can grasp. Artress quotes the words of Robert Lawler “that circles, centers, spirals all embody an ancient discipline called sacred geometry. In ancient times, it meant contemplating the forms, by which the essential creative mystery is rendered visible.”¹⁰ Sacred geometry is the key to creating an “abode of eternal truth.”¹¹

Both *intention* and *attention* are essential to pilgrimage, as well as the creative imagination. Phil Cousineau, a Detroit author, challenges us to *imagine* both our life journeys and our actual journeys as labyrinthine.¹² He suggests to us that we mindfully attend to the myriad possibilities of travel: the effort of planning, the expense, and the risks, ranging from discomfort to lost luggage, missed connections, strange food and language, theft, wrong directions, disorientation, illness and even death. These factors literally mark our lives as well, but he quotes Alduous Huxley, “Experience is not what happens to you, it is what you *do* with what happens to you.”¹³ He suggests that we learn to recognize our “*clews*” as well as practice patience, trust and faith as we journey. In a response to the question as to how to begin to change the world, Rupert Sheldrake suggested in 1992 that we begin by changing “tourism into pilgrimage,” and helping “tourists become pilgrims.”¹⁴ This remark served to galvanize and confirm Lauren Artress in her sense of “call,” that the recovery of the labyrinth as a powerful spiritual tool was an idea whose time has come.

There is no *one right way* to walk the labyrinth, or our lives either, but what is recommended is that we do this with intention, that is, to choose continually to do so, to enter the path consciously, so to speak. Some possible approaches to walking the labyrinth can be to quiet the mind, focus the attention on the breath, on a question or concern, or on trying to stay open and receptive, to walk contemplatively (or skip, or dance as one is moved), and to pass others on the path. It is important to find one's own rhythm and pace, be aware of one's own body as well as one's surroundings, to pause at the center in some receptive mode, and return to the world with one's experience or the fruit of one's experience. The latter is something that can be harvested over time.

What is your interest/experience with the labyrinth? Is there any interest for having one at St. Andrew's? Please talk to Lorna Williams or me by phone, in person, or by e-mail: <bpelland@juno.com> or <lw1997@yahoo.com>

Some labyrinths in our area:

- Weber Center in Adrian has a lovely, large outdoor labyrinth set in a natural location.
- Saint Joseph Mercy Hospital has one embedded in the pavement between the Cancer Care and the Ellen Thompson Women's Center.
- Visitation in Monroe has a portable labyrinth which they make available on the first Fridays of the month in the "barn," which serves as their chapel and workshop center and there is often a ritual at some point in the day. This facility is run by the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
- Sparrow Hospital in Lansing has installed one in a lovely outside courtyard which they encourage patients and their families to use.
- Parishioners of St. Katherine's Episcopal Church in Williamston have a labyrinth in the woods near their church; it has a wide path to accommodate people passing by one another more easily. There are regularly scheduled labyrinth rituals there and it is open for walking at any time.
- Several workshops on the labyrinth have been held at St. Andrew's and a portable labyrinth was borrowed for several workshops.

Bernadette Pelland has attended St. Andrew's since the mid-1980s. She initiated the Spirituality Committee and was a member of the Christian Formation Committee. She was a long-time member of the Adrian Dominican Congregation and has spent her professional career in administration and education at the college level. She was a licensed counselor and is a trained and experienced spiritual director. For two years she has taken a St. Andrew's group to Adrian to walk the labyrinth there.

Notes:

¹ J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1972), 173.

² Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 47.

³Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (Berkeley, Calif.: Conari Press, 1998), 128.

⁴Artress, 57.

⁵Cousineau, 128-130.

⁶*Ibid.*, 128.

⁷Artress, 12.

⁸*Ibid.*, 4-6.

⁹*Ibid.*, 57-67.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 47-59.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 50.

¹²Cousineau, 131.

¹³*Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴Artress, 34.



J2A Pilgrimage Reflections

Introduction by Donna Wessel Walker

St. Andrew's is one of many Episcopal churches to use the *Journey to Adulthood* (J2A) curriculum for adolescents. J2A is a comprehensive 2-year program (preceded by the 2-year Rite-13 program) that is holistic in its approach, varied in activities, and effective in nurturing teens during these crucial years. The curriculum discusses four wide areas, guiding members to celebrate, explore, and accept new responsibilities in Self, Society, Sexuality, and Spirituality. The program culminates in a pilgrimage.

In June 2004, nine J2A pilgrims journeyed with three adult leaders (Sue Bickley, Russ Olmstead, and Lorna Williams) to Santa Barbara, California. The pilgrimage goal was to visit missions established early in California's Spanish settlement. They went to Santa Barbara, San Buenventura, La Purisma Conception, and San Luis Obispo. They also walked the labyrinth at Trinity Episcopal Church, and visited the Episcopal monastery in Santa Barbara. Staying at a tourist hostel near the beach in Santa Barbara, the pilgrims also went to the Fujio State Beach and Los Padres National Forest, and made a day trip to the Channel Islands.

The editorial team of *CrossCurrents* asked two J2A pilgrims, Sam Bates and Virginia Lowe, to share with our readers their memories and reflections on the pilgrimage. Their essays follow.



Trying to Find God on the West Coast

by Sam Bates

The major lasting impression our J2A pilgrimage had on me was that it let me fall in love with California and the West Coast. Thanks to the hours and days I spent climbing through the wind-blown grasslands at the top of Santa Cruz Island, strolling past the dazzling fountains that populate the vast gardens of the Spanish missions, battling the foaming green waves at the edge of the Pacific and wandering about the bustling, sun-dappled streets of Santa Barbara, I have become enamored with the casual beauty and unlimited vitality of this present-day Xanadu. It is a place so unlike Michigan, so far removed from the steady, earthy gravity of the Protestant Midwest, that I could sense the difference from the moment I stepped off the plane; a place that not only has hills, but has *mountains*, not only with lakes, however great they might be, but an entire *ocean*.

The West Coast *felt* different from the first time I went there. Most of my mother's family lives in or around the Seattle-Tacoma area in Washington, and we used to visit them during the summer. As a child, I was never very good at being social or polite, so I was left with ample time to explore the neighborhood. I remember warmly the days I spent climbing the tree roots in the near-by park, harvesting the blackberries and apples that grew wild throughout the alleyways and exploring everywhere from the gigantic hill overlooking town to the loading docks behind the local market. We used to go to the ocean and just sit, looking at the outlandish sand dollars and starfish and smelling the smells that are nowhere to be found in the level cornfields of Michigan. I loved the new land I had found. In contrast, my parents seemed to believe I was miserable because I didn't feel like sitting in the kitchen all day and chatting about *New Yorker* articles and what kind of sweater I was wearing.

Unfortunately, our visits became more and more rare as my sister and I grew older. We seldom had the time or the money to catch a plane to the other side of the country for a week, even during the summer. This disappointed me, because as I got older, I wanted more and more to travel, and to find out just what the world was like outside of Ann Arbor. So when the idea of a pilgrimage came up, I was overjoyed. Initially, the idea was to travel to Scotland, the area historically connected with St. Andrew's and the

Episcopal Church. However, two things stopped us; the high price of plane tickets and our parents' reluctance to send their little bundles of joy out of the country so soon after 9/11. So we settled for a pilgrimage inside our great nation. We had a couple of close calls, one of which would have sent us to a camp deep in the heart of the Black Hills country in scenic, lively and diverse North Dakota. Thankfully, we chose California instead, with the intent to explore the Spanish religious missions that dot the Pacific coastline. Through some desperate fundraising and parental subsidy, the class managed to scrape together enough to meet the costs of room, board, and transportation.

After the uneventful plane ride and the wait outside the car rental lot, we finally checked into our hostel. It was a small, one-story stucco building surrounded by palm trees and located beside the railroad tracks. The bedrooms were made up of approximately ten bunk beds each. The hostel consisted of four such rooms and a private room, which Lorna occupied, along with a single bathroom, kitchen and common area. We stumbled into our respective rooms (one for the girls and one for the boys) and almost immediately fell asleep. When we got up the next morning, we took advantage of the complimentary toast and coffee and then set off on the first of many daytrips.

For a person who was born and raised in Ann Arbor, and whose only trip outside of the country was to visit an uncle in Canada, the sheer exotic marvel of a place like California was almost overwhelming. The Spanish street signs, the exotic plants, the mountains and the ocean all served to heighten the feeling of wonder. We traveled to the beach, to waterfalls, to a mist-shrouded monastery high in the mountains, to a horse-ranch and a sun-bathed, grass-covered island far out to sea. Our trips took us throughout the countryside, from one awe-inspiring mission to the other, each visit enthralling me more. But throughout the entire trip, as much as I tried, I did not feel any sort of religious joy or conviction. None of the happiness I felt bore any relation to an epiphany or restoration of faith.

For some, the purpose of a pilgrimage is specifically religious, and under this definition, my pilgrimage was a failure. Whatever measure of religious conviction I had is now all but nonexistent. However, the journey did change my life. One of the few things I'm certain of as a teenager is that I want to go back to the West Coast. Maybe only for a vacation, maybe for college, or maybe to find a job or make a home, but I want to go back, and spend some more time in the place that has touched me so deeply. That is the conviction that our pilgrimage has given me, and it's enough for me for now. I can only hope that it has given my classmates the same sort of faith and security that I found.

Sam Bates was born in 1988 and grew up in Ann Arbor, first attending Abbot Elementary School, then Forsythe Middle School. He was baptized at St. Andrew's and is now completing his senior year at Pioneer High School. Sam is an Eagle Scout and his interests include creative enterprises of any type, as well as martial arts training and reading.



The Island

by Virginia Lowe

We were gone only a week but I think part of me grew at least a year. I didn't realize it then, and probably didn't truly discover it until quite a bit after the pilgrimage was all over. Slowly, bits and pieces of this new me began to filter through into my everyday life, and I only really noticed its presence during times of reflection. But when I look back on my pilgrimage now, I can hardly believe that it's been only a little over a year. Time seems to have swept by since then and it's difficult to picture myself as being merely 16 now when being fifteen seemed so long ago. Maybe this is the difference between feeling like just a teenager and feeling like a young adult.

It was a strange feeling to be dropped off at the airport by my parents and to be getting on an airplane without them. This would be my first flight without my family and even though I would be with my friends, I felt a sense of exhilaration at the thought of my new independence. The flight out to California had its initial excitement but I really began feeling the thrill of it all only when it was almost over. As the airplane began its descent, a reddish glow emanated from the horizon and stretched out across the land to touch the tops of the mountains. The plane coasted down from the clouds and towards the valleys shrouded in a hazy darkness until finally, the mountains blocked the last vestiges of sunset and we had reached our destination: Los Angeles, California. When the trip from LAX to Santa Barbara was finished, it was roughly 4 a.m. back home in Michigan. By the time we got to the tourist hostel, we were exhausted. But even sleep deprivation couldn't fully silence the voice in the back of my mind that kept reminding me of the wonderful things the days ahead might bring.

That week spent in California seemed at times surreal, especially when we were visiting the missions. At those missions, there were lush gardens, with all sorts of stunning, exotic birds and plants. There were fig trees with leaves larger than your hand; there were serene fountains; buildings, aged under the bright coastal sun, with a certain beauty that came from their architecture, history, presence, and meaning. There was also the morning that our group went to visit the monastery. There was an incredible stillness and calm around it, the world cloaked in a shroud of mist, and a tranquility that carried through the grounds and monastery. We also went to visit a waterfall that had almost completely dried up. While we had been expecting something a little more "active," I found it to be a great place for photos. I have pictures now of the forest surrounding it,

the large boulders in the creek bed leading away from it, and a few shots of looking up towards the top of the waterfall while standing at the very base of the enormous, moss- and plant-covered rock that the water was trickling down. Of all the places, though, I find that I enjoyed most the trip out to the Channel Islands. Yes, I did get a nasty sunburn on my face and along the part of my hair, but it was well worth it considering all that I gained from those few hours there on one of the islands.

The ocean sang with the songs of the dolphins and whales that we would see on the trip there and back, and the winds made the dry grasses dance like the crystal blue waves. The edge of the cliff where I hiked marked the edge of the golden island, the grasses highlighting the ancient terrain like the gold and bronze of some priceless treasure. At this point, I could look out one way and see the rolling hills and steep, rocky valleys of the small island, and even further beyond that, the Pacific stretching out as far as the eye could see. If I looked another direction, I could see oilrigs looming in the mists like gray giants, curled up against the wind and waters. Just past the oilrigs, I could see where, if the mists parted, the coastline of California was. If I looked down, I could see the waters churning as they crashed against the bottom of the cliff and the large rocks scattered in the cove.

The color of the waters that were veiled in the shadow of the cliff reminded me of the sky right as twilight ends and the stars begin to join the planets in their celestial waltz. The waters that were fully illuminated by the sun took on an amazing hue of blue that could have put to shame even the beautiful summer sky above. The waves undulated serenely in the cove and looked as if diamonds had been thrown into them, millions and millions of diamonds that were swept close to the surface as each sun-washed wave crested. From my vantage point at the very edge of the cliff, I stood before a several hundred foot drop. The winds blew in my hair as I stood there, looking down and around at the expanse of the ocean around me, and I couldn't help suddenly feeling so small in comparison to the grandeur of the breath-taking vista.

I felt so alive. There was an enigmatic harmony to standing there at the edge of the world, winds swirling around you as the warmth of the sun encapsulates you completely. It was difficult to comprehend fully something of that sort of magnitude, of being taken from the protective bounds of my ordinary thoughts and being able not just to tell that I was standing before the largest ocean on the planet and at the top of a very high cliff, but to be able to feel just how small I was and just how big everything else was. I didn't need words or any sort of outside information to know that I was truly little more than a microscopic speck compared to the mass of the Pacific and the island, let alone the

entire world. I felt as if I were finally, for maybe the first time in my life, seeing things with my eyes fully open and in full perspective. It was a humbling experience to receive such a glimpse of the true dimension of things. One can certainly walk up to the ocean and take one look at it and describe it as big, but it is something else entirely to *feel* that it's big, to not just see what's immediately around you but everything all at once. I think that feeling helped me to put my life into perspective. My memories, thoughts, plans, concerns, requirements, and wants seemed to untangle themselves and fall into order, and I could see the significance of different things in life and just how I needed to act accordingly, such as how certain plans would have to change. Everything became just so clear, and even though I knew I didn't have the complete picture of my life, it felt as if I at least had a beginning of an understanding of it.

On the flight home, it felt like I was leaving a part of myself back in California. It would be a part that I was willing to leave, as I knew it meant that I would forever have a connection to that spot where I stood on the island. The days would pass and turn into weeks and months and I would wonder when I might get to go back to the island, never quite realizing that even when it was so far away, it was still affecting me and helping me to be not just a teenager but a young adult. I still have a long way to go on this path of mine through life, but, despite my initial doubts that such a trip could ever have such a profound impact upon my life, I know that the direction of my path has changed because of the trip to California. And I'm glad that it did.

Virginia Lowe has been a member of St. Andrew's since 2001. She is a second year student at Washtenaw Technical Middle College and was recently inducted into the scholastic honor society Phi Theta Kappa. She enjoys writing and drawing, taking long bike rides, and playing her violin. She was born in California and has lived in Michigan for the past 15 years.



Christ is Our Destination

By Lorna H. Williams

I have had the honor to be a pilgrim several times over the last ten years. I have ridden an unbridled camel up the bumpy slopes of Mount Sinai to visit the place where Moses received the Law from God. I have prostrated myself in front of one of the many altars in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that houses the traditional tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem. I have stood on beaches with my toes gripping the sand as I looked out at the Atlantic Ocean and later at the Pacific Ocean with young pilgrims from St. Andrew's. I have had long conversations with other pilgrims while we waited in the rain outside the walls of Vatican City.

Traveling to holy sites is a very old concept and early Christian pilgrims went for various reasons. Some went on pilgrimage as an act of thanksgiving to God, and others went as a way to obtain forgiveness of sin. Some pilgrims traveled to seek healing for their infirmities while others went to visit places associated with Jesus.

The places where pilgrims have gone are worldwide and various, including Jerusalem, Sinai in Egypt, Canterbury in England, monastic houses in the United States and so on. The well-known and famous Christian sites are well visited, but other places are sites of pilgrimage also, such as one's birthplace or a family home site. Places of pilgrimage are as varied as the pilgrims themselves.

I can go on and on about where people have been as pilgrims, but ultimately, that is not what a pilgrimage is about. There is an Irish proverb that says: "It is not how far one goes that makes a pilgrimage, but how far one's heart goes." Where we go on a pilgrimage may enhance our experience, but the journey originates and unfolds in the heart. A pilgrimage is symbolic of the following of Jesus. A pilgrimage is a journey where we go to meet and experience the divine in a variety of ways, both as an individual and as a member of a community. The goal, the destination of a pilgrimage, is Christ.

A true pilgrimage includes relationship. This is important to keep in mind even though one may start the journey alone. On the way, the pilgrim is seldom alone. One may experience Christ profoundly through the word or embrace of a fellow pilgrim. Even the ancient presence of other pilgrims may make the presence of Jesus more tangible. In my experience, I have felt the closeness of Jesus as I touched the places that have been worn smooth by the hands of thousands of people before me. Through such experiences in relationship, one grows spiritually and positive change can occur.

For me, the form of spirituality that closely embraces the concept of pilgrimage is that of the Carmelite tradition. Its origins rise from the experience of early Christian pilgrims who later became hermits. They made their home on the holy site of Mount Carmel in Palestine, a place that is closely associated with the prophet Elijah (1Kings 18) and with the Blessed Virgin Mary. According to the Carmelite tradition,

“A pilgrimage is an acting out of the journey we take towards intimacy with God. The desire for intimacy with God is at the heart of the Carmelite vocation and paradoxically this intimacy has its genesis in community. The pilgrim soon learns the benefit of sharing the journey with others and in this need community is brought to life.”¹

Teresa of Avila, a Spanish Carmelite nun and mystic of the sixteenth century experienced the presence of Christ through personal revelations and through her relationships with others. Her life was a series of pilgrimages, through which she constantly searched for the heart of God. Through her preaching and writing, she shared with others her colorful, joyful and even painful visions of God. As a reformer of monastic life, she taught her nuns to sing and even dance their praise to Christ, to feel his presence with them through the shaking of the tambourine and the beating of their feet. As she lay dying, the sacrament of bread and wine was brought to Teresa to comfort her. Her last words were: “O my Lord! Now is the time that we may see each other.”²

Until we see God face to face, we are invited to meet God through our experiences with people, places, situations and conversations. We are invited to go on pilgrimage, to open our hearts to the movement of the Holy Spirit. We are invited to go places we have never been before, to risk meeting our loving God and then letting ourselves be changed by that sacred meeting.

In the words of Teresa of Avila:

*Let nothing upset you,
Let nothing startle you.
All things pass;
God does not change.
Patience wins
All it seeks.
Whoever has God
Lacks nothing:
God alone is enough.*³

Lorna Williams is the Senior Associate at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She has led and made pilgrimages to Palestine/Israel, Egypt, Rome, Vatican City, London, Ely, Edinburgh, Jamaica, and the United States.

Notes:

¹ Damian Cassidy, "A Pilgrim People," *Carmel in the World*, www.carmelite.org/laycarmel/pilgrim.htm, accessed October 21 2005

² St. Teresa of Avila, quoted in *The Proper for the Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2003: Together With the Fixed Holy Days; Conforming to General Convention 2003* (New York: Church Publications, 2003), 402.

³ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Complete Poetry of Teresa of Avila: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Eric W. Vogt (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 1996), 33.



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