

“May the Road Rise to Meet you, Yes, YOU!”

A, Pentecost 15 ; 10:00 am
Romans 14:1-12; September 17, 2017
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

I. ON A PILGRIMAGE JOURNEY TOGETHER

We are on a journey! You, me, CUCC.

Back on Labor Day weekend, we launched our Fall theme of Journey. We reflected how we are on the road together, beginning with the liturgical season of “Round Up,” as we come back together in countless ways after a summer of adventure.

We committed to be on that Journey in covenant—a spiritual, communal, adventure. A Pilgrimage of sorts. A Journey of Faith into our future as a congregation.

Scripture reminds us to: “Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”

And so we prayed: “God, we place our everyday, ordinary life as a congregation—our gathering, worshiping, eating and communing around the Table. Our working, serving, reaching out, praying, connecting, caring and supporting one another and our neighbors in community. We bring our stretching, growing, learning and sowing seeds together. We link arms and help and hold one another up as we walk each other home. We bring our entire journey as “Christ’s body of chosen people” in this time and place before you, Great Spirit of God, as an offering.

We will go where you go, and love whom you love. Trusting, following your lead. Take our lives and let them be, consecrated Lord, to Thee. Amen.

PILGRIMAGE THIS WEEK!

And now, today, we continue on that journey and take it to another level—that of a Pilgrimage. A special, profound kind of journey—not just a trip, but a spiritual quest. And, this is not just for those of us going to Ireland, but for every one of us.

You. Are. There!

WHAT EVERY PILGRIM NEEDS TO PRACTICE

The special kind of journey known as pilgrimage has a special set of tools—practices, disciplines, that one can employ to guide one’s path. Let’s look at a few of those, as we commence.

(from: *Pilgrimage...exploring a great spiritual practice*, by Edward Sellner)

a) The practice of mindfulness: paying attention, listening, living in the moment.

This may sound very “new age!” Or Buddhist, or like something out of a self-help book. But it’s also very ancient age! And Celtic Christian.

b) The practice of daily prayer upon rising and before sleeping
The Celts had a prayer for everything!
“The Celts had the imagination and the faith to find God in the ordinary and the commonplace as well as to invoke his aid at times of disruption and abnormality. They also had a great desire to give thanks to God for the many blessings that he bestowed on them. The underlying note of Celtic spirituality is one of hope and joy not sorrow and despair.” (*The Celtic Way*, Bradley)

Prayers abound for special occasions like baptisms, journeys and death but also overflowing thankfulness to God and invoking God’s presence in the mundane everyday tasks of life. Get this! Found in Celtic prayers were “blessings for the house, for taking a bath, for hatching eggs, for clipping sheep and for tending the loom!”

(We heard an echo of that from St. in our scripture for today: “tend to your knitting!”)

A daily prayer upon rising that many many people around the world finding meaning in, now and over the centuries past is the “Prayer of St. Patrick.”

Here is a portion for us this morning. I have also provided copies for us to take home, put it on your bedside table or on the fridge. Pray this prayer each morning, and commit your day and very being to God. We will do the same in Ireland, as we pilgrimage together, and join our prayers with you, one in the Spirit, one in the Lord.

PRAYER OF ST. PATRICK

I arise today
Through God's strength to pilot me;
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's hosts to save me
Afar and a-near,
Alone or in a multitude..

I arise today
Through the mighty strength
Of the Lord of creation.

c) The practice of reading sacred texts before leaving on pilgrimage, during one's travels, and after one's return

Reading scripture is a practice we would do well to do more of . If you don't know where to start, the Women's Missionary Society continually provides Our Daily Bread devotionals for us.

See the basket in the narthex and pick up one today. Take a moment each morning to read and reflect—daily prayer and reading of sacred texts is part of the journey.

I also have a number of daily emails I read each day—based on scripture and deep thought. I find it both uplifting and grounding. I would be glad to share those resources.

And check out the CUCC Facebook page. My Reverend brother-in-law has been crafting some wonderful, challenging “spiritual thoughts of the day”, based on scripture, and I have been sharing them there on Facebook. If you don't Facebook, talk to me and I'll share another way.

Other sacred texts beyond Scripture can guide us on our journey. Poetry was important to the Celts and can guide us into depths and breadths as well. A few verses from *Desiderata* guide our path:

Desiderata

Go placidly amid the noise and haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence.
As far as possible without surrender
be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly;
and listen to others,
even the dull and the ignorant;
they too have their story.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Be yourself.
Especially, do not feign affection.

Take kindly the counsel of the years,
gracefully surrendering the things of youth.
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune.

But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.
Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.
Beyond a wholesome discipline,
be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe,
no less than the trees and the stars;
you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God,
whatever you conceive Him to be,
and whatever your labors and aspirations,
in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul.

(Max Ehrmann, Desiderata, Copyright 1952.)

d) The practice of asking questions, seeking direction

This sounds like something the women will do but not the men!
(on this trip and many trips :)

One of the purposes of Pilgrimage is to seek answers, new perspectives, a broader, deeper, higher view on the very ordinary matters from home, work and daily life.

Sellner reminds us: “Pilgrimage is often a search for answers to serious questions in a person’s life. It may be a quest for healing or spiritual guidance.”

Pilgrimage is: A transformative journey to a sacred center. A spiritual exercise, an act of devotion to find a source of healing, or even to perform a penance. Always, it is a journey of risk and renewal. For a journey without challenge has no meaning; one without purpose has no soul.”

We are challenged to “take a question” on our journey. To throw out to God in creation a challenge or wondering, and look for

God’s to speak to us through the journey, the people, the surroundings.

I am taking this question to Ireland: Where is God wanting to lead CUCC into the future. What is on the horizon with great hope for us as a congregation? What is God already doing in the world that we can jump into and live out our calling?

I invite you to “ask a question on the journey”—whether you are traveling, or journeying together here at home. Throughout this Fall and into the new year.

e) The practice of journaling or of quiet reflection

While on the trip, we will be reflecting each day in a Journal called: Ireland: A Celtic Pilgrimage Across the Threshold of the Soul

These are daily questions and reflections, scriptures and prayers that I wrote in conjunction with another pastor, for our particular pilgrimage. To bring meaning and depth and keep us living in “kairos time”—that time without the clock that is holy time, filled with the presence of God.

At home, journaling is as easy as picking up a pen and pad and sitting someplace quiet and writing whatever thoughts come to mind! Write to God, as if writing a letter. Or Jesus. Journal your own unique journey.

f) The practice of letting go, being open to the mystery

“Let go, let God.” Best 4-word prayer you can find. Repeat it often. Breathe in on “let go” and out on “let God.” And repeat.

g) The practice of gratitude for all one sees, and all one meets
“In all things give thanks, for this is God’s desire for you, in the Spirit of Christ Jesus.”

An “attitude of gratitude” is not just a catchy phrase, but a way of life to cultivate.

WHAT ELSE FOR OUR JOURNEY?

And finally, what else do we need for our journey?

How about if we try a little Kindness?

A story by Jean Brody (arrived in the wee hours of the morning when I was thinking about this message today. I took it as a sign!)

It costs nothing to be kind. Acts of kindness can, at most, cost you time. But, guess what? Most of the time your kindnesses afford you such pleasure that monetary costs are rarely even noticed and, you know what else? There are no such things as unimportant kindnesses. All good deeds and thoughts are important both to the giver and the givee (receiver).

On one of our trips abroad Gene and I went to Ireland. We crossed on the ferry from England, our little rented car in tow, and when we landed very early the next morning, off we went. Happily, we headed for the rather remote rural B and B inn we had reserved long in advance.

We had planned to check in, rest a bit, and then take off in our little car and see as much of Ireland as possible.

So we were bouncing along this very rural back road. Have you ever been there? Let me tell you, the roads in Ireland are awful! The idea of routine road maintenance seemed to be way down on their list of priorities and the further you get away from the bigger cities the worse the roads get.

We slowed way down and were diligently trying to avoid the deep ruts and pot holes but, alas, we hit two deep ruts at one time, blowing two of our four tires into flying rubber. Oh, my heart sank. Here we were on a Saturday morning, very early to be knocking on a complete strangers door to ask to use the telephone to get help.

We walked and walked, stumbling on the rocks in the road and finally there was a little square house amidst a stand of trees. Realizing how early it was to disturb anyone we still had no choice.

A few soft taps on their door brought two apple-cheeked, pajama clad little boys to open it. We asked to use their phone and immediately they ran to fetch their unshaven, sleepy poppa. He emerged, yawned, and when he heard our story, he scratched his belly and handed us the phone. He told us who to call and we were told someone would come out in several hours.

Well, this Irish gentleman said he realized we were tourists and had reservations, therefore, why didn't we take HIS car on to the inn and when our rental car had two new tires on it, he would drive it to the inn to us and return home in his own car.

Frankly, I thought we heard him wrong. We, perfect strangers to this man, were being offered his own car to use while he got ours in running order. Surely he either didn't say that or there would be a big charge for it all. There was no charge.

His genuine kindness was for real. He would take nothing for spending his Saturday helping two strangers. Of course we sent a big box of gifts to them when we got home. That exemplary kindness is one I shall never forget. In fact, I believe it was the highlight of that trip to Ireland.

I try to remember that kindness cost nothing and is never unimportant. I pray I never pass up the chance to do a kind thing for another.

The View from the Mountain is Wondrous, Jean

AN IRISH BLESSING

May the road rise to meet you,
may the wind be ever at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and the rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of his hand.
Amen.