

Pilgrim's Progress

Based on 1 Chronicles 15:23-29

How's your progress, pilgrim?

The word 'pilgrimage' has long been associated with hiking treks that follow in the footsteps of the saints of old. Today, just as in Medieval days, men and women walk the paths to important Christian sites, or take the same journey as a beloved character of our Christian history and heritage, searching for spiritual awakening along the way. It is said that even the mysterious Knights Templar had their beginnings as hired security for the wealthy of the Medieval age, making a pilgrimage to see the Holy Land. Now, routes like the El Camino de Santiago in Spain to the shrine of St James, or the Via Francigena route to Rome in Italy, will challenge hikers and explorers alongside spiritual wanderers.

At Bible study this week, we dug out an old heavy Biblical Dictionary from some preacher's dusty study, published in 1909. It defines 'pilgrimage' as a physical or spiritual journey meant to deepen one's understanding or relationship with God. So, this pilgrimage does not necessarily mean that you need to dig out your hiking boots from the back of the closet. A pilgrimage could simply be a mental exercise, or a spiritual awakening, an "a-ha" moment in the every-day rhythm of life, that somehow, moved you a little closer to God than you were before.

- It could be a long-planned trip to the European continent, filled with stops at small villages and grand cathedrals.
- It could be a journey from breakfast to dinner on a normal day in your home.
- It could be a reflection of where your life has travelled from last Thanksgiving, to this Thanksgiving.

So, I ask again. How's your progress, pilgrim?

Special holidays often make us stop and reflect for a bit. Whether we realize it or not, we take these times, and consider what is the same as last year, or the year before' or those traditions and patterns, that have been, it seems, forever; Uncle John slipping his secret bathtub gin into his glass of fruit punch. Aunt Vera lobbying a wild comment as dessert is served, watching amused over her Royal Albert tea cup as the rest of the table fumes in frustration.[yes, these are some of the 'traditions' I remember, and the real names of the famous characters involved!]

But of course, if we are to remember all things that are the same, then we are forced to consider as well, the things that are not. Death. Divorce. Disease. Disappointment. Despair. Who we are this Thanksgiving, is never exactly the same person as we were last Thanksgiving. The world around us has changed over the last twelve months. This pilgrimage we are on, called life, has changed us over the last twelve months. So, how's your progress, pilgrim?

Has your faith deepened and come closer to Christ these last twelve months, or have you become more disillusioned or disappointed:

- With God?
- With yourself?
- With the church?
- With those around you?
- With society?

Let's just pause here for a moment. Be honest with yourself:

Is there joy in the house of the Lord?

Is there joy in your house: your heart, for the Lord today?

There's no right or wrong answer here. There is only honesty between you and your Creator. And folks, He already knows the truth on your heart, so if you're not really letting your truth thoughts come to the surface, the only one you are fooling is yourself.

A little uncomfortable with the direction this conversation is going? That's because, now, you are on a pilgrimage, pilgrim! It's OK to say:

- I hadn't realized I was getting a little off track!
 - I hadn't thought about how COVID and my fear of all the possibilities of getting sick was cutting me off from You and from experiencing this great world of Yours.
 - I didn't realize that I was sad.
 - I didn't want to accept the fact that I am very angry.
 - I'm not sure that I like the fact that I'm not the same person I was a year ago.
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- You may discover that you have drifted away from the level of intimacy you had with God.
 - You may discover that you have become closer to God.
 - You may discover that some parts of your faith are stronger than ever while other aspects need a little tweaking.

These are the things you discover while on a pilgrimage.

When King David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, it was like a ticker-tape parade with no expense spared. There was music and dancing and food and wine. There was a procession with a grand entrance of the Ark, shining in the sun with elegantly dressed Levites alongside. This moment in the history of the Chosen People had been a long time coming. This moment wasn't just about the victories of King David in battle, the carving out of a land for the People, or the creation of a great city that was to be the center of their culture and their religion. This Ark had been on a journey, a pilgrimage since the days of Moses and the design of the Ten Commandments on Mount Saini.

This pilgrimage of the Ark, the presence of God to the ancient peoples,

- Had travelled through desert for forty years,
- It had been held up before battles,
- It had been stolen,
- Retaken,
- Kept in a tent,
- Moved about,
- Dismissed by the people,
- And brought back into focus over the generations, making it way in the world.

In the good and the bad, the difficult and the frivolous, God had been with His people. And at this moment in time, King David was bringing the Ark to rest. The pilgrimage of the Chosen People was complete. And there was joy in the house of the Lord.

So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouts, with the sounding of rams' horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps. (v28)

Yet, trouble was lurking, just behind the curtain of the festivities.

- Waiting.

- Planning for an opportunity to distract.
- There was no joy in Michal's heart that day.

So, here we are today, marking yet another Thanksgiving.

How's the progress, pilgrim?

- Is there joy in your house today?
- Do you see God at work in you?
- Are you a David, or a Michael?

What awaits for you in the year to come?

How would you like to grow in the next part of your pilgrimage, pilgrim?

Is there joy in your house today?

Will there be joy in your house?

Will you work on finding that joy, pilgrim?