

# Sermon

## Pilgrims

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, May 21, 2023

Seventh Sunday of Eastertide

*Deut. 26:1 When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, 2 you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. 3 You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." 4 When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, 5 you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6 When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7 we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8 The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9 and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. 11 Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.*

*1John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

*3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.*

**I. Some years ago I was speaking to a group about the most recent pilgrimage I had taken.**

**A. When I mentioned that I had spent a day and a half with Sarah at the Durham Cathedral . . .**

† **Praying in Cuthbert's tomb**

† **Sitting in gratitude before St. Bebe's final resting place**

**. . . it was too much for one of my listeners.**

**They asked, pointedly, "Why would you waste so much time and money to do so little?"**

**B. I was not offended**

† **I knew the person asking was asking from a place of true confusion. I knew them to be a great champion for causes in their community who eschewed many luxuries in order to be generous with others in need.**

† **And it was (and is) a fair question:  
"Why would we 'waste' so much time and money on something like pilgrimage?"**

**C. As CPC prepares to send a group to walk the Camino de Santiago, I will speak to the spiritual**

**discipline of pilgrimage several times and today is the first.**

- II. Let me begin with the idea of “wasting time” with God.**
  - A. In our world — Time is money!**
    - 1. With careful attention given to our productivity over time.**
    - 2. With time management strategies**
    - 3. And an economy which is built upon the expectation of ever-expanding productivity.**
  - B. And we often take this production-mentality even into our worship of and prayers to — God.**
    - 1. In a Presbyterian church - heaven help the pastor if we go beyond the appointed hour of worship.**
    - 2. And, if your prayers are as mine, we may be the sort of people who approach God daily with our laundry-list of concerns, and dreams, and hopes for which we seek God’s attention.**
  - C. But when was a loving relationship ever established by:**
    - 1. Watching the clock with an eye to production**
    - 2. Spending every conversation on what we *want* from the other?**
  - D. If we desire to love God — if might be time to waste some time with God.**
    - 1. That is:**
      - † Spend time alone with God and God alone where we are not trying to gain any advantage.**

- † Spend time in simple adoration of God.  
2. Mother Theresa's advice to Nouwen...

- E. Jesus warned his disciples about excessively wordy petitions to God, saying, "Do not pray like that, for your Father knows what you need before you ask..." (see Matthew 6:7-ff).  
F. The great Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel

*"In technical civilization, we expend time to gain space. To enhance our power in the world of space is our main objective. Yet to have more does not mean to be more. The Power we attain in the world ends abruptly at the borderline of time. Time is the heart of existence."*  
*[Heschel, p.3 - prologue to The Sabbath.]*

*[most of our time is spent] wringing profit from the earth; [but time is given so that] we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul."*

I have paraphrased the last above, PHL. *[Heschel, p.13 The Sabbath.]*

**So sometimes we intentionally let go of our obsessions about productivity in order to waste time simply loving God.**

- II. When Sarah and I chose to waste 2 days in the cathedral in Durham England it was because we felt called to be there.
- A. We had a feeling that God was inviting us to "go."  
B. The restlessness was a combination of many things  
1. I desired to say thank you to St. Bede who was a "renaissance man" 700 years before the Renaissance - scientist, historian, and author:

† **Ecclesiastical History of the English People**

2. **To be with St. Cuthbert, too, who's gentle, humble, and self-sacrificing life was a model for me as pastor.**
3. **We were drawn to “go” and say thanks in person - not unlike the way I feel drawn to visit my parents' graves to say thanks for the many ways they blessed me.**

**C. Pilgrimage as a spiritual discipline reflects our faith's long and significant commitment to the conviction that God calls people to “go.”**

**D. Our passage from Deuteronomy this morning is a good example. — the first creedal statement found in scripture:**

*4 When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, 5 you shall make this response before the LORD your God: “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6 When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7 we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8 The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9 and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.”*

**E. Our first statement of faith *begins* “A wandering person was my ancestor . . .”**

† **Alluding to Abram and Sarai, of course.**

**F. “...from your father's house, your country, your kindred . . . to a land I will show you...”**

**G. The long journey to the land of promise begins with a willingness to depart familiar lives - trusting that God goes with us.**

**III. There is far too much I *could* say about this discipline than would fit inside a sermon so let me mention one other aspect.**

**A. While the discipline of pilgrimage has often meant making a journey to a distant place . . .**

**B. It is *also* true that from the start, the concept of “pilgrimage” was applied to simply every day discipleship.**

**C. The “pilgrimage” of our life before God was lived amid the quotidian duties of ordinary life.**

**1. St. Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Knox and others are all found speaking of our discipleship as a “pilgrimage” with God.**

**D. While the bible occasionally uses the word “pilgrimage,” it most often describes this as “walking with God.”**

*Psa. 26:3 For your steadfast love is before my eyes,  
and I walk in faithfulness to you.*

*Jer. 6:16 Thus says the LORD:  
Stand at the crossroads, and look,  
and ask for the ancient paths,  
where the good way lies; and walk in it,  
and find rest for your souls.  
But they said, “We will not walk in it.”*

*Rom. 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

- E. Our Camino pilgrims have been walking since yesterday and some of us have walked with them.**
- F. In Spain they will walk more than 10 miles daily.**

**IV. In the coming weeks, and especially during the time of their journey in Spain, I hope that you and I will be “walking” with them and with God.**

- A. We will do that by holding them in prayer**
- B. By living faithfully as disciples**
- C. By listening to the ways God is calling each of us to be a pilgrim for the love of God.**

*3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked.*