

## Tourists and Travelers

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As many of you know, Cindy and I walked part of the Camino de Santiago in the fall of 2012, along with Gini King, who retired as Centre Street's pastor in 2009, and Wendy Harrington, who lives in Addison and has worked for Maine Seacoast Mission for many, many years.

The Camino de Santiago, translated as the Way of St. James in English, is an ancient network of pilgrimage routes in Europe leading to the cathedral in Santiago, which is in the northwest corner of Spain. The cathedral, built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, is said to house the remains of St. James, one of Jesus's disciples, and has drawn pilgrims from all over the world for centuries.

Few people walk to Santiago for purely religious reasons these days. Many are drawn to the Camino for the physical challenge, the chance to spend time in nature, or just to take a break from their regular lives. In previous centuries, pilgrims simply walked out the door of their homes and made their way to Santiago—but there are now eight or nine main routes, of varying lengths. The best known, and the only one we'd heard of in 2012, is the Camino Frances, which begins in southern France.

It was March or April when we first talked about it with Gini. Cindy and I were curious, thinking it would be great to do someday, but it was hard to imagine taking the time away from our work and other responsibilities, especially on what felt like short notice. Gini, however, was eager to go. Now. I've never quite figured out how Gini manages to be so persuasive, but before I knew it, Wendy was on board, and we were researching backpacks, sleeping bags, walking poles, and trail shoes, creating packing lists, and ordering the pilgrim passports that would allow us to stay in the hostels designated especially for Camino walkers.

There wasn't nearly as much information about the Camino online then, but Cindy did some reading on the internet and in books. Jane Hinson had told us that Helen Swallow, from Pembroke, had made the trek, and we met with her and asked lots of questions. What about finding drinking water? What if we get injured? "The Camino will take care of you," she promised us.

Still, I was busy that summer and didn't have a real sense of where we were going or what to expect. I do remember Cindy read that we should be prepared to sleep out in the open or perhaps

on church steps if the local pilgrims' hostels were full. I'd never been to Spain, it wasn't on my bucket list, and there were so many unknowns.

Gini and Wendy left around the second week of September and started their walk in Leon, and we caught up with them a week later, in a tiny village called Triacastela. The four of us then walked together for three and a half weeks. Through woods, fields, small towns, hamlets of no more than a few houses, farms, and lush forests. Past improvised shrines, wayside crosses, crucifixes, and tiny chapels. Always moving forward toward the cathedral in Santiago.

When you stay in the pilgrim hostels, call albergues, you have to be out by 8 a.m. Occasionally, if you know the name of the albergue you wish to stay in, and have a phone number, you can call them in the morning and ask them to hold beds for you that evening. But that depends on having cell phone reception, of course, an ability to speak a little Spanish, and the patience of the person on the other end. Not all albergues will let you call ahead to reserve a bed ahead of time. And most of the people running the albergues and cafes didn't speak English. I think we called ahead maybe twice. Generally, we set off in the morning and trusted we would have a place to lay our heads that night, even if it ended up being out in the open or in a church doorway, which we actually never had to do, although we came close at least once.

It was tempting, while walking the Camino, to ruminate about the past. And whenever I had a chance to stop in one of the chapels along the way, I took the time to pray and to light a candle for my older sister Marily, who had cancer, and to mourn our beloved dog Hattie, who had died in July. It was tempting to worry about the future. We knew the cancer was going to take Marily from us, barring something from out of the blue. Centre Street's pastor had announced his resignation eight weeks earlier after a bruising and contentious tenure of less than a year. We Centre Streeters weren't sure what was going to happen next.

My grieving and worrying about the past and future were understandable. But I wanted to immerse myself in the present, too, knowing I would miss out on so much if I didn't. I wanted to feel my muscles working, fill my lungs with sweet forest air. I wanted to take in each broad vista, notice every little path that led off the trail into the woods or a field, hear each cowbell in the distance, drink in the bright colors of the flowers lining village windowsills.

I had to pay attention, especially on the rocky paths, and use my walking poles for balance and to help me climb. If I didn't, I might fall, or twist an ankle. And I wanted to stay aware and alert to the experience. Whatever my levels of enthusiasm and anxiety beforehand, this was the opportunity of a lifetime, one I never expected. And I felt so grateful to be healthy and strong enough to walk day after day, grateful to be with companions on this journey, the Camino, the Way.

A few years after we returned from the Camino in Spain, I received a copy of the alumni magazine from the University of Washington, where I got my undergraduate degree. The UW alumni association regularly hosts travel tours, and this issue advertised a tour of the Camino de Santiago. Reading the advertisement more closely, I saw that the tour group would be on a bus, not walking, and that the tour company promised “premier lodging and dining” as well as time in each of the main cities close to the route.

The tour would culminate in the Pilgrims’ Mass at the cathedral, a service held at noon each day to welcome the pilgrims who have arrived within the previous 24 hours. The conclusion of the service brings the lighting of the giant censer, or incense burner, which is then swung from the cathedral’s domed ceiling by a system of pulleys operated by eight men. It’s quite spectacular, and people visit the cathedral just to watch those few minutes of drama. In short, though, the advertised tour only faintly resembled our experience of the Camino, with its communal sleeping quarters and bathrooms, simple, cheap, and, honestly, not very tasty pilgrims’ meals, sore muscles, and washing sweaty clothes by hand at the end of each day. Yet I wouldn’t have traded my journey walking the Camino for a clean, easy, comfortable bus tour, not even the day we walked in pouring rain.

In an article from 2016 in the *Christian Century* magazine, Peter W. Marty tells us that the early Christians used the Greek word *hodos*, which means “the way,” to describe their communal life in Christ. And in this morning’s passage from John, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Marty points out that Jesus doesn’t say “I am the answer,” here or anywhere else, although many of us assume he must have said that somewhere along the line. And the difference is important.

The Way suggests a journey, with its uncertainties, unexpected discoveries, and sense of adventure. The Answer suggests that something is already packaged for us. It involves little risk, few if any surprises, and we don’t really have to explore, or work to discover it; it’s complete already, and just given to us. With the Answer, we have handed much of the responsibility to someone else.

Marty goes on to cite historian Daniel Boorstin, who explains the historical difference between travelers and tourists. Travelers were people interested in unfamiliar settings and wild encounters that enlarged their own perspectives. “The traveler was active,” Boorstin says. “He went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience.” In contrast, “The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes sightseeing.” In other words, tourism is more of a spectator sport, with packaged experiences.

The root of the word *travel* comes from *travail*, meaning “work,” or “trouble.” Travelers take risks, and move forward, perhaps with a destination in mind but open to how they get there and

what might happen along the way. In contrast, the word *tour* is from the Latin *tornus*. A tornus was a tool for making circles, and *tourist* literally means “one who goes in circles.” Tourists seek pleasure and consume, they observe, and then they go home, making the circle complete.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with tours or being a tourist. We all need to choose the path, and the manner in which we experience it, that works for us. As my friend Amy says, sometimes you just have to put yourself in the hands of the committee. Even when we’re tourists, we can develop an appreciation for, if not a personal understanding of, a place and its culture. And a tour may well allow us to go places and see things we wouldn’t otherwise.

But I think it’s worth asking ourselves every so often, As people of faith, are we travelers or are we tourists? Are we willing to grow, to seek adventure, to immerse ourselves wholly in the journey and allow ourselves to be changed by it? Or are we content to play it safe, be spectators, consume the prepackaged experience that is provided for us?

In this passage from John, Philip says, “Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us.” And I can’t help but think of the Camino tourists who say, “Show us the cathedral, let us see the giant censer swinging from the dome at the Pilgrims’ Mass; that will be enough for us.”

One of our most beloved hymns in the New Century Hymnal is “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?” The beginning of the second verse says, “We are pilgrims on a journey, we are travelers on the road.” Notice it does not say, “We are pilgrims on a journey, we are *tourists* on the road.”

As this faith community based at Centre Street, are we travelers or are we tourists?

As tourists, we show up for the worship service on Sunday morning, sing and/or listen to the music, listen to the speaker—or not—see our friends, maybe enjoy a cup of coffee and a cookie. Then we go home or exit out of Zoom, and our circle is complete for the week. We went to church and got what we expected, and it was a pleasant experience. No real surprises—and no real work on our part, either.

But my friends, we’re at a time in the life of Centre Street Church when we are invited to be more than tourists; we have a chance to be travelers. We’re invited to open ourselves to the unexpected and to change, to explore—to be adventurous! If we take advantage of the opportunity to be travelers and immerse ourselves in this work of God, I believe we will find our lives, and the life of this church, enriched and strengthened. I believe our faith will be deepened as we take more responsibility for our journeys as individuals and as a community. I’ve seen it happening already.

In this passage from John, Jesus tells Philip and the other disciples that they'll carry on his work. "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do," he says.

The Bible tells us the kind of work that Jesus did. Among other things, he fed the hungry. He welcomed everyone, even the outcast. He comforted the lonely, the sick, and the grieving. He named and confronted injustice. He called us into community with him and each other. He has shown us what God looks like, sounds like, acts like, and he's given us the responsibility to continue what he started.

He has equipped us to live out his teachings and his character, and he has put a lot of faith in us—more than we often have in ourselves, I daresay. "You know the way," he reassures the disciples. "I trust you to do this."

Being a traveler instead of a tourist can make us anxious, with all its unknowns. But the rewards can be rich. More important, we can do more of God's work in the world. And we are not traveling the Way alone. Just look at us, gathered here this morning. As the second verse of the hymn says, "We are pilgrims on a journey, we are travelers on the road. We are here to help each other go the mile and bear the load." Thanks be to God.