

“PILGRIMAGE”

Psalm 84:1-12 May 26th, 2019

“A pilgrimage is not a vacation or sightseeing tour but a quest to encounter God.” Today I would like to share with you a little glimpse of where I will be for the first two weeks in June and what I am anticipating. That definition of “pilgrimage” seemed helpful to me because I will not be going on vacation and the purpose is not to “have fun.” Yes, I’m sure there will be some enjoyable experiences along the way but on a pilgrimage there is a goal. It is a journey one undertakes to a sacred place with the intention of asking for the Lord’s blessing in one’s life, in supplication for a particular petition, or even to ask for physical or psychological healing. It is a personal invitation from God, comprised of His offer and dependent upon the pilgrim’s acceptance. God’s call may vary but the purpose remains consistent: It is an individual summons to know God more fully. A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey to which the pilgrim joyfully responds “yes” to God’s invitation. I have said “YES!” to a journey that has been my heart’s desire for many years.

Looking back at the beginning, I really think it began years ago with a study book on the UMW recommended list titled Heart Whispers, by Elizabeth J. Canham. I went back to look for a review of the book and it stated...”offers accessible insights from the Benedictine spirituality to help us explore the need for faithful living in today’s often stress filled world through listening with “the ear of the heart.” The sixth century monk Benedict gained a fresh perspective on Christian spirituality through three simple vows: stability, obedience, and conversion. My UMW evening circle read the book together and discussed it and prayed together. Perhaps it resonated with me at that time in my life because I was teaching full-time and raising two daughters as a single mom. I acknowledged my need to keep the Sabbath and schedule regular times for retreat—whether an afternoon in the mountains or a week-end away from the daily routines of my life.

When I began attending the Five Day Academies for Spiritual Growth as part of my need for retreat and renewal as a pastor, I was drawn to the time for worship, learning, reflection, solitude, silence—all within a community of believers. I first heard of the Iona community and opportunity for pilgrimage from Dr. Lloyd Allen, my instructor on Christian history at three of the Academies. He would show us photos of pilgrimages to Iona, as a “thin place”, where historically many pilgrims were blessed with time to draw nearer to God. It became a “heart’s longing” for me and I felt called to find a way to participate in one. I thought I would be able to go to Iona in 2017 but it was not to be. I was so frustrated and disappointed at the time. But when I heard Dr. Allen at another Academy at St. Benedict’s Retreat House in Nebraska and he showed the same photos of Iona I took the initiative to approach him about a possible pilgrimage in 2019. There were enough others interested that week that Dr. Allen inquired of the Upper Room group and Johnny Sears if they would be willing to look at scheduling one for the summer of 2019. They were and they did and now I am days away from living out this “heart’s desire.”

We leave from Newark, New Jersey on June 2nd, fly into Glasgow, Scotland on the third, take a ferry ride to the island of Iona for a week, walk the mudflats from Iona to the island of Lindisfarne for another few days, and travel back to Edinburg to fly back to the States on June 15th.

Speaking again of “pilgrimage,” ...the pilgrim must embark on this journey with joyful anticipation, being willing temporarily to separate himself from the world and to offer himself or herself in humble service to another. A successful pilgrimage involves a commitment to leave behind one’s problems and to focus

instead on seeking to learn more about our heavenly Father, making one's heart full of desire for special graces, praises, petitions and thanksgiving, returning home transformed, renewed and restored by the abundant blessings received.

Now I'd like to share with you two videos on pilgrimage and specifically on a pilgrimage to Iona that I trust will give you more of a sense of what I may encounter. Because—you know, my friends, you are going on this journey with me, you will be close in heart and in my prayers while I am gone....
Sharing "A Pilgrimage to Iona, Scotland" (2:34) with The Very Rev. Gary Hall and "Iona: A Celtic Pilgrimage" (10:49) with the Rev. Nancy Brantingham..