

## PILGRIM IN RESIDENCE

JUNE 2020

### INTRODUCTION

*“Stay in your cell  
and your cell will teach you everything.”*  
Desert Saying

Welcome Pilgrims in Residence. It’s a bit of a paradox, isn’t it? - to be a pilgrim in *residence*.

Pilgrimage assumes a journey to sacred places far from one’s own backyard. Indeed, when I envisioned this theme I imagined sharing insights from some of you whose footsteps touched thin places on Iona, walked along the Camino de Santiago, hiked with Hildegard of Bingen in Germany, and experienced the “fifth gospel” in Bethlehem.

The time of COVID-19 invites a different kind of pilgrimage. We are pilgrims in residence and our backyard is sacred ground.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers were aware that pilgrimage is about surrender and truth-bearing, about vulnerability and grace, and forgiveness and resurrection. The journey evokes experiences that push and shape, summon our attention and open our heart. The outer geography holds a mirror against the inner transformations that the journey invites.

While the sacred places of the world offer an energy that situate us and ready our heart, the Desert Fathers and Mothers knew that staying home with intention has similar power. They constantly affirmed staying the your cell.

Staying in your cell teaches us to how to make silence, how to listen to the voice that whispers when our restlessness settles, how to share communion with the landscape around us, how to make diligent effort in prayer and bind the wounds that come from living through our days.

This retreat invites you to plan a pilgrimage for yourself. You won’t leave home. You’ll work out how it will work for you. It will be different for all. I’ll offer you some direction on four movements of pilgrimage and you put together what seems inviting to you.

We are pilgrims in residence. Our journey begins.

## GETTING READY

Decide on the length of your pilgrimage. I like sunset to sunset pilgrimages because it takes me back to Israel and the Sabbath that begins when the sun sets on Friday and ends with nightfall on Saturday. You might have a longer time for your pilgrimage or you might have a morning or afternoon.

This pilgrimage is not about distance travelled. You may not go further than your back deck or your hammock, or perhaps around the block or to a city green space.



You might want to create a pilgrim's bag for yourself. This is more than an accessory; this is an intentional gathering of what supports and sustains you on your pilgrimage. Look at St. James. He has a satchel and on it is a shell.

A seashell is the emblem for St. James. Medieval pilgrims making the pilgrimage to his shrine in Spain often wore a scallop shell symbol on their hat or clothes.

When pilgrims presented themselves at churches, castles, or abbeys they could expect to be given as much sustenance as could be picked up with one scoop. They would receive hospitality.

The shell, carried by pilgrims, was just the right size for gathering water to drink, a makeshift bowl for eating. Gather together what is "just enough" for you.

Is there a symbol that is important to you? Perhaps you will also take a notebook with pen or markers, a camera for receiving an image, a bible or prayerbook or one for prayerful reading, a light lunch, a water bottle. What else helps you be open to the spiritual treasures that are waiting for you or helps you to pray with the eyes of your spiritual heart or assists you in deepening your awareness of Oneness with Earth and all our kin?

## DEPARTING

This is a time for re-collecting. Intentionally bring your attention to stepping over the threshold. Notice the energy that is stirring in you. Don't judge it or name it good or bad. Here and now is a place you are and be there with your whole selves.

Settle into an awareness that you are surrounded by Love. Breathe deeply.

Go for a contemplative walk. The distance doesn't matter, It may be a long, unwinding walk or a journey of a few steps. Your body will know what is required of you.

Know your journey in place. You journey with HaMakom, the God whose name is Place. I've written of this before but it is an important image of the Divine for me.

I learned this Hebrew name for God when I was in Israel - HaMakom.

It means "The Place." It is more than a geographical location. It is more than the "thin place" where the veil between heaven and earth is tissue thin as George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, defined it.

HaMakom is a place that is capable of holding 'something else' - something 'more than' the ordinary.

God is HaMakom. God is that place in us - that carved out hollow space that is full of God *even when* we are full of turmoil, confusion, fear or wonder.

God is HaMakom. God is that place in us - that centre of our being, that point of nothingness where Dark Beauty and Love's Pure Light meet.

God is HaMakom. That place in which we find ourselves and *know* we are not alone. In the words of Tilden Edwards, "We live inside Divine Love at all times."

God is The Place of meeting.

Leave with the expectation of such a meeting. You will know it when you see it, though you may be home and into next week before it is fully revealed. Be hopeful. Be patient. Be prepared to seek and be found, or be quickly found and need time to seek.

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## ARRIVING

*“Did I tell you to find a part of nature that speaks to you.  
Then know it intimately and well.  
For some it is a mountain peak.  
For some as windswept beach.  
Find your own and in it find your restoration.”*

–Elizabeth Knapp

You may come to a place where you decide to pause and spend some time. Perhaps you will decide to make silence.

Here is a practice of entering the Silence you might want to explore.

It is based upon a practice of the Seneca (Native American) nation. The imagery is adapted from the words of Twylah Nitsch:

Close your eyes. Breathe out three times.  
Listen and hear the Silence . . .  
Listen and see the Silence . . .  
Listen and taste the Silence . . .  
Listen and smell the Silence.  
Breathe out one time. Listen and embrace the Silence.

(accessed on the Spirituality & Practice website)

There is something about pilgrimage spaces that is saturated in the prayers and struggles of previous pilgrims. It is this that makes place sacred. When I lived in Israel I also learned the phrase “Fifth Gospel.” Four of the gospels tell the good news of the Wisdom Jesus in books according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The fifth gospel is the land. Place itself reveals something of the One who lived and walked Earth.

We come close to God and God comes close to us in many landscapes; all land is holy. The mystics of old knew this. “Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things. Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God” says Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327)

The modern mystic, Margaret Wilf says, “When we go down into our own sacred space, we move closer to the centre and heart of all creation. There we encounter each other, and the eternal presence

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in which we are held. We discover a web of interrelatedness that calls us into a unity which defied the kind of separateness and estrangement from each other in which many of us live our lives today.: Her words are especially potent for this unprecedented time.

In the place you are, take whatever time you need. You may know exactly what you want to do here. You may need to explore and move on. You'll know.

Wherever you pause you have all the time you need.

*"What we need is here"* says the poet Wendall Berry in his poem, The Wild Geese.

## RETURN

*The point of travelling is not  
To arrive but to return home  
Laden with pollen you shall work up  
Into honey the mind feeds on.  
- RS Thomas*

The twentieth-century Welsh poet and priest, RS Thomas has something important to say about pilgrimage whether we travel far or are a pilgrim in residence.

When it is time to go home and re-enter the daily round of the ordinary know that your retreat is not over. It is still working in you. Your work as pilgrim is just beginning.

It is poets who are so often our guides. The poet Rashani writes:

"There is a brokenness  
out of which comes the unbroken,  
a shatteredness  
out of which blooms the unshatterable [...]  
There is a hollow space  
too vast for words." [Read the full poem here: <http://rashani.com/arts/poems/poems-by-rashani/>]

Your time as a pilgrim in residence will overflow the boundaries of time. Be attentive.

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If you received a photograph or two on your pilgrimage, make time to practice Visio Divina, Sacred Seeing. With the eyes of your heart, you may have seen more than you realize. (Here is a link to the Practice of Visio Divina.)

After a day or two, return to this retreat. Is there a quote or a part of this retreat that particularly calls to you? You may hear something differently when you re-read it.

Practice sacred art-making. Allow your creativity to take you deeper (especially if you think you can't draw or write) and see what emerges. Give your creation a title.

Be guided to scripture. Trust yourself to find a passage, a story, a Psalm that is just for you.

Be gentle, Pilgrim in Residence. Even as we re-open all around us, know that re-opening is also happening in our internal spaces. "Be where your feet are" as the wisdom teachers say and trust that is the place of HaMakom. It is exactly the place you are meant to be.

## THE NEXT EMAIL RETREAT and SUMMER READING

With all we have to hold in this year unfolding, the schedule of Prayer Bench retreats and resources might seem a little confusing.

You have received:

- January Retreat: *How Then Shall We Live*
- February/March Retreat: Lent Retreat *Stardust*
- April Holy Week Series: *Not Just Back Then*
- April Retreat : *Making Spiritual Resilience*
- May *Stroll for Your Soul*
- June: *Pilgrim in Residence*.

At the end of June you will receive the Summer Sabbath Series called "*The Inventions of Summer*."

The next monthly retreat is September and it is called, "Miracles." It is based on the memoir by Canadian author, Sarah Bessey called: *Miracles and Other Reasonable Things : A Story of Unlearning and Relearning God.* I respect this book. I appreciate her struggle, and while her theology doesn't always fall in the same place as mine, I learned from her. I offer it as a summer book you might enjoy and we'll see where it takes us in our September retreat. Sarah is from British Columbia. Here is her website. <https://sarahbessey.com/>