

**By Another Way**

*Along The Way, a sermon series on the Camino Portugese*

*Matthew 2:1-12*

*Preached by Rev. Ridgley Beckett on September 14, 2025*

Today is our 5th Sunday in our Sermon Series *Along the Way, Reflections from the Camino Portugese*. We've been following my journey from Porto, Portugal to Santiago de Compostela, Spain on the Portugese Camino. The Portugese Camino is part of a framework of mideval trails that all lead to one place—a cathedral in Santiago de Compostela where the remains of St. James the Apostle are believed to be. All of these trails are a part of “El Camino De Santiago” translated as “The Way of St. James” for centuries people have traveled along these trails, staying in hotels, hostels, and churches taking pilgrimage.

I had the opportunity to do my camino on a bicycle this past January while on Sabbatical, and throughout the summer I've been sharing my experience each day through the lens of pilgrims in scripture. If you've been tuning in, you know my Camino started off a bit rocky and wasn't at all what I expected. However, after I adjusted to my “new normal” the adventure taught me more about God than I'd ever learn in a seminary class, bible study or church service. Many of you have come up to me during this series sharing about people you know who have done it, and also your desire to go on one yourself—taking pilgrimage and journeying apart from all that life tells us is important recenters us and reminds us what God tells us is important.

You may recall one of the central themes to the past two days on my Camino was this idea that God was leading me, through the saints that have gone on this in years past, with this yellow shell sign printed on your bulletins, and also with my beloved provisional route signs. Because much of the Camino I traveled on had low lying trails along streams and creeks, reroutes around typical flooded areas became my lifeline. You see, I had impeccable timing for my Camino—I was biking when a tropical storm was hitting the coast of Portugal. Luckily, by day 5 the storms were dissipating and I was only getting hit by bands of wind, (small) hail and rain periodically the day before. To say that I worked for this, was an understatement.

I LOVED my first night in Spain. What I discovered when I arrived in Pontevedra was that the region I was in—Galicia was the area in Spain with the most concentrated number of people who had been diagnosed with Celiac Disease. Everywhere I went, I had gluten free options galore. I HAD ARRIVED.

I walked around town that night, visiting pilgrim square. In the middle of the square sits the Church of the Pilgrim: an 18<sup>th</sup> century late Baroque and Neoclassical style roman catholic church with a scallop-shell-shaped floor plan. Inside is a statue known as Nuestra Señora la Virgen del Camino—the Virgin of the Way—Our Lady of Refuge. Mary holding the child

Jesus, both dressed as pilgrims. For centuries, pilgrims have come there when they felt lost or weary, trusting she would give them the courage to continue.<sup>1</sup>

I sat down in a pew, took a few deep breaths, and prayed: *Guide me, God. Guide me, God.* In that Catholic church full of strangers, this Presbyterian pastor felt strangely at home. And I realized that trusting God's guidance is what pilgrimage is all about: when the way ahead feels uncertain, we can't *just* rely on signs and maps—we *must trust* that God is leading us on our way.

That night, my waiter discovered it was my first night in Spain. After I ate my fill of delicious and fresh seafood, he told me his story. He'd left the grind of American culture after his mother died and moved to Spain without knowing what would come next. At first, he was uncertain, but something in him said it was the right move. Now, years later, he's at home in a slower pace of life that feeds his soul. His story struck me—because he had the courage to trust his instinct, even when the “safe” thing to do would have been to stay put. His courage to trust that nudge struck me—like the pilgrims who came to the Virgin of the Way, he trusted there was a way forward.

That night I rested soundly with a full belly thinking about what he said—amazed by his courage to leave behind all that he knew and trust his instinct that he was being led elsewhere.

The next morning, I bid goodbye to my favorite city of Pontevedra and set my eyes on Caldas de Reis, my next destination. By then, I had started to *enjoy* my trip rather than *endure* it. I became more comfortable journeying the way I was, even if it was windy, cold and wet. The courage I was living into started to feel more like my own and not just something I was manifesting.

But soon I came upon a “path” that was STRAIGHT up hill on VERY big rocks and a stream running down it. “This can't possibly be the way forward,” I thought. But I was in the middle of the woods, what was I to do? I got off my bike, and started to push my (very) heavy bike up these rocks. At times, I was straight up standing in the stream and lifting my bike over these rocks. “Bike a medieval trail” they say “it'll be fun” they say. UGHHHH. Never again. The only thing that got me up that long hill was my ANGER.

Later that day, my soggy self encountered another flooded trail, this time also up hill, but no provisional route sign. My bike computer started losing gps signal and was telling me to continue in ways I wasn't sure about. I couldn't continue on the path that was set before me, and I wasn't sure about the path my preloaded bike route was presenting. In that moment there was no part of me that trusted it.

Everything pointed to go a certain way, something in me told me I needed to go another. I didn't feel as nervous as I had been about being “lost” anymore. I knew I could get to where I needed, navigating the old fashioned style—asking for directions. I trusted my surroundings and people now that I knew how pilgrims were treated from experience.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tfp.org/our-lady-of-refuge-the-divine-pilgrim-patroness-of-the-pilgrimage-to-santiago/>

After a couple minutes of considering what to do and staring at a map, I made my own route around the flooding. It was risk, but I felt more certain about this than I did with any of the other decisions I was making earlier in the week. For the first time on my Camino, I trusted my own sense of the way forward. And it worked—I found my way back to the trail.

A couple miles later, my instincts led me back to the trail where I wanted to be and I continued on. That day my bike computer was back and forth in and out of GPS signal and the fewer shells signs forced me to something I hadn't quite done yet. Make a decision, trust my gut, and know that when I came to another crossroads, I'd make the best decision I could and I'd get there.

In the church of the pilgrim, in my waiter's story the night before, and in that moment of rerouting, the same truth echoed: sometimes God's Spirit nudges us away from the obvious road, and gives us the courage to go another way.

We live in a world full of directions. We have GPS directions, road signs, business manuals, codes of conduct, car manuals, college plans, laws, career trajectories. *Everyone's telling us what to do, think and be—all of the time.* And all of them are convinced their way is the way. The hard part is that we live amongst all of that—take it in—and decide which way is *our* way. Then, we come to church—and scripture tells us that we need to follow the way God is showing us—and wouldn't you know there isn't a manual! We do so much talking about God leading us, following “the way” God has laid out for us.

But what do we do when the way that seems to have every light shining on it—doesn't seem quite right? Do we trust our gut? Is that us being selfish? Or is it the Holy Spirit nudging us?

*What do we do when every sign points one way, but God's Spirit nudges us another?*

That's exactly what happens in Matthew's Gospel. The Magi were told by Herod to return the same way—but God's Spirit nudged them to go another. They trusted that nudge, and their courage spared Jesus' life.

Our scripture this morning harkens us back to the beloved days of Christmas and Epiphany in our church year—with the account of the magi who also made a journey, a pilgrimage to follow a star in the East. These Zoroastrian priests were astrologers from Persia. They were fascinated and ‘filled with joy’ by this incredibly bright star that lit their way many miles to Judea.

They came to King Herod and said “Where is this newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the East, and we've come to honor him.” This is intensely frightening news for Herod. He schemes to use the magi's journey for his own benefit because for he wanted to kill Jesus. Herod tells the magi to go to Bethlehem, find the child, and report back so that he may pay homage to him as well.

The star led the magi to the baby in Bethlehem and they paid him homage, greeting him with gold frankincense and myrrh. They knew Herod's intentions and trusted their instincts and ignored Herod's instructions. Instead, *they returned home another way*. That night an angel warned Mary and Joseph in a dream to flee. This saved the child.

Within the first couple days of our savior's life he was a refugee fleeing a corrupt king in power, finding refuge in Egypt. The courage of the magi is noteworthy and can teach us a lot as people of faith. Jesus' life was spared thanks to these magi- who were not Jewish—but experienced God's mystical blessing that night that filled them with great joy. They honored something that they weren't quite sure about but knew it would soon come into fruition. And when a man in power used them to bring about violence against this child, they had the courage to choose another way.

As people of faith on the journey we are on, we will encounter times when the way forward may seem obvious, but not right. The way forward may seem simple, and the way of God's love may require some risk, courage and trust. The world will always point us toward the safe, the easy, the expected. But like the Magi, and like any pilgrim who finds courage on the road, God calls us to another way — the way of love and justice that can change lives.

This story teaches us that just because something is easy and comfortable, doesn't mean it is the right step forward. It may not feel like what you *need* or something you have *time for*. It may even feel like a big risk. That instinct, that feeling deep inside of you nudging you is God's spirit in your very midst, inviting you to go another way. The way of justice, the way of peace, the way of resistance, but also the way that points to love. The world may tell you it is wrong because of systems it works against, but God's justice is far from any form of human systems we have created.

Our journeys are inherently personal—we encounter so much in our own lives and little circles around us that can take up all of our focus. And those things matter, but never at the expense of discipleship. God shines a light, to pull us out of our own worlds, to use us in ways we wouldn't imagine. When the world tells you to stay in line, look up. God's light may be calling you another way. Trust it. Just as the Magi dared to take another way, and just as I had to trust a muddy, uncertain path on the Camino, God invites us to trust the Spirit's nudge in our own lives — to step off the well-worn trail when love calls us to another way.

We read this passage of the magi during the church season of Epiphany—right after Christmas. The season of Epiphany is filled with LIGHT and a light that shines and is not overcome by any of the darkness in the world or in our lives.

God illumines for us what we are called to care about, who we are called to care about—God illumines a way of justice and peace that doesn't let division, hate, or manipulation overcome it. God illumines a way of justice and peace that doesn't let racism, sexism, ageism, and any other sinful human constructed way we've made overcome it.

Church—when the world tells us go a way that seems to be antithetical to the rule of love, I pray that God guides our attention upward—to look up and see that God’s light is shining abundantly guiding us another way. And that way, just might save the world.

Benediction

Go now, trusting the nudges of God’s Spirit. Like the Magi, like pilgrims on the Camino, take the path that love and justice light before you. Step courageously into another way, and know that God will not lead you wrong. The path may be uncertain, the way may be steep, but God is with you. Follow the Spirit, take another way, and let love lead the way