

A Different Camino
John 14:1–7
Sunday, September 28, 2025

Let us pray: Lord, you have the Word that leads to life. Speak that Word to us, that we may find life in you and share it with others, in Christ. Amen.

Throughout the summer, Ridgley shared with you stories from her sabbatical pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago, as she biked over 120 miles from Portugal to Spain. So I thought I would keep that series going one more week and share with you a little bit about *my* sabbatical pilgrimage. The only thing is, *mine* looked a lot different than *hers*. Because with three teenagers who had work and camps and church trips and doctor's appointments and surgeries, and Jen still having to work full time, we couldn't really go anywhere. We had *little* trips – we drove out to Pittsburgh for a long 4th of July weekend; we went to Dorney Park for a day – but we weren't going to Portugal. Pilgrimages like that are *great*, but I know that not everyone *can* do that. Whether due to financial or physical limitations, not everyone can go to Portugal or even Pittsburgh. So how do you make a pilgrimage when you can't go anywhere?

I shared a little about my sabbatical on Wednesday night, and I talked about how, leading up to it, I was doing a lot of reading and talking to *other* pastors who have taken sabbaticals, trying to get a sense of what worked for them, what they would do differently. And one person said, “If you just go home after you finish worship on your last Sunday, it's not any different than any other Sunday. You're about to start this big, different thing, and so you need to do something to prepare yourself to enter into it.”

So I decided to go on an overnight retreat. The only problem was that the retreat center I wanted to go to didn't have any room; they were all booked up that weekend. So instead I went to the exotic Embassy Suites hotel in Chesterbrook, where I spent the night reading, praying, writing about what I hoped this time would be. I just went somewhere without any distractions or interruptions and spent time with God.

And one of the things that I did was go on a long walk in Wilson Park. And while I walked, I prayed, and I looked at the geese and the deer, and I felt the light rain falling on my face, and I knew that I was in the presence of God. *That* was my Camino.

And there were other Caminos in the months that followed:

Going on morning walks in my neighborhood.

Driving out to Pittsburgh on the Turnpike (which does have its surprisingly beautiful moments), listening to the kids laughing in the back of the car.

Driving to the hospital for a surgery and praying the whole way there that everything goes okay.

Sometimes my Camino was walking behind the lawnmower in the yard, tending to my little corner of creation.

Sometimes it was going to lunch or dinner with friends.

Some days my Camino was nothing more than bed to kitchen to couch.

Some days it was going to the grocery store, walking the aisles, buying fresh food to make something good for my family.

Sometimes it was going to Phillies games with Ryan, having an uninterrupted hour with him on the drive there and back where we could just talk.

Sometimes my Camino was to the movie theater.

Sometimes it was the drive the Lancaster, talking to the kids about what Amish people believe and why they live the way they do.

Sometimes my Camino was a rollercoaster track.

Sometimes it was going down to the basement to put together tiny little model houses and churches and libraries, a new hobby I took up that was surprisingly meditative and centering.

Sometimes it was waiting in the line to pick the kids up from school.

Camino is a Spanish word that simply means *path, road, or way*. And a pilgrimage can happen on *any* path, *any* road. It can happen on your way *anywhere*. Everywhere you go can be a pilgrimage. Sometimes the pilgrimage is *external*, and you're literally journeying from one place to another. Sometimes the pilgrimage is *internal*, and you're on a different kind of journey. What matters, wherever you're going, whatever you're doing, is that you're being intentional about doing it with God, paying attention to God's presence in the world and in your life. Whatever way you are walking, you are walking it with Jesus.

Jesus spent three years travelling from town to town preaching, teaching, and healing people, and his disciples travelled with him, following him everywhere he went. Now he's preparing to go on one last journey – to the cross and the tomb and beyond. He's having one last meal with his disciples, and he's talking with them, preparing them for what is coming. And he says, "Where I am going, you can't go. But don't worry. I am going to come again and take you to myself, so that where *I* am, there *you* may be

also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Well, they literally *don’t*. They don’t know where he’s going, and they sure don’t know how to get there. So Thomas says, “Lord, we don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the way?” To which Jesus says, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. If you want to come to God, follow me.*”

There’s a lot that we could talk about there, but here’s what I want to focus on. *I am the way*. In Spanish that would be, “Soy el camino.” *Camino*. There’s not a road or a path or a way that we travel to *get* to Jesus. Jesus *is* the way that we travel. And we can travel that way everywhere we go, even if we don’t go anywhere at all.

There is a phrase that comes out of Celtic spirituality: *thin places*. The idea is that there are some places in the world where the distance between heaven and earth collapses and becomes *thin*, so that we feel closer to God. Being in the Holy Land or on the top of a mountain or in a church building. I have never been a fan of the idea of thin places. It’s not that some places are more “holy” than others; that we’re more in God’s presence one place than another. It’s just that there are some places where we *expect* it more and pay better attention. But *places* are not holy. *People* are. And the challenge is to pay attention in the normal, unexpected places of life, that we might encounter God’s presence *there*.

So I didn’t need to go to a spiritual retreat center to be in the presence of God. I could do it at the Embassy Suites or in the car or in a hospital room or around a dinner table. Because the whole world is *saturated* with the presence of God. The *whole world* is a thin place. Because in Jesus Christ, the distance between heaven and earth has *vanished*. The separation between the human and the divine, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul, has *disappeared*. In Christ, heaven has *come* to earth. And our calling as his followers is to recognize his loving, life-giving presence in every aspect of our lives, in all the ordinary, everyday places, to *live* in that presence, to be mindful and aware of it

everywhere we go, and to help draw others into it, that *they* might be aware of Christ's loving, life-giving presence with *them*, so that, *maybe*, earth can come a little closer to heaven.

It's to say, as Jacob did in the book of Genesis, when he falls asleep in the wilderness, in the middle of nowhere, and he has a dream, a vision of angels going up and down a ladder from heaven to earth, and he hears the voice of God say to him, "Know that I am with you, and I will keep you wherever you go." And he wakes up from that dream and says, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!" What if we could say *that* at least once a day? If we are walking the way that is Jesus, then every step can be a pilgrimage. Everywhere we go, in everything we do, we can say, "Surely the Lord is in this place." In this house, in this school, in this office, in this restaurant, in this park, in this car, in this airplane, on this train, in this movie theater, in this stadium, in this hospital room.

God is with us *always, everywhere*. We just have to open ourselves up to recognize it. But if we are walking the way that is Jesus, then every step we take, we take with him.

I have always been drawn to the way that Thomas Merton says it, when he prays,

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does, in fact, please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always,
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death,
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

You do not have to *go* anywhere to be in the presence of God. Because God is with you *everywhere* you go. Just pay attention.