

Introduction

I live in an ecumenical household in that I am an Anglican Priest and a Lay Preacher in the Methodist Church, and my wife, Helen is a Methodist Presbyter. I have long had a love of Celtic Christianity, completing an M.A. in Celtic Spirituality at Cliff College, and the “Walking the Story” course run by Wesley House. I do also try to follow a rule and Celtic rhythm of life with mixed success. So it was with great delight to hear that we had been accepted onto a pilgrimage organised by Jill Baker. In August 2018 we set from Glasgow to the Isle of Whithorn by train, bus and on foot carrying our weeks need’s with us in rucksacks.

During the pilgrimage it struck me that as I minister in 4 churches with predominantly elderly congregations the vast majority of my fellow Christians would be physically unable to undertake a pilgrimage such as this, and therefore not experience the benefits of taking time and space in this way to be exclusively with God.

From that, this Church Based Pilgrimage notion took seed and was nurtured, underpinned by a few conversations that encouraged me to reflect on how much worshippers understood and gained from their own denomination and style of worship, or if they take the various elements of what is the church building, its fabric and tradition for granted.

This comes to you with the experience of being trialled in mine and my wife’s churches, however everyone’s situation and learning / maturing styles are different, and you may feel that it needs to be adapted further to suit your own circumstances – please do so. The main thing for me is that everyone is provided with an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with God in a way that is accessible but also challenging.

I am very happy to enter into conversations with anyone who would like to explore this and I can be reached on jokpenfold@aol.com.

God Bless

Julian Penfold

Church based pilgrimage.

What is a pilgrimage?

"To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God." declared Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. Whilst the whole of life can be considered a pilgrimage, it is also a specific intentional time where the individual makes the time and space to be with, and to listen to, God.

Pilgrimage is a time to make an effort, or to go without, or to allow God the opportunity to speak to us. There is a sense of sacrifice to be near God.

Often "Pilgrimage" is associated with long walks to specific sites of Christian interest such as where the remains of Saints are held, where a Saint had a particular interest, or where Saints have walked themselves.

However, for many the physical exertion of walking for miles carrying a rucksack is physically impossible so this "church-based pilgrimage" is designed for people to visit a holy place and make the exertion of walking and reflecting without having to don walking boots or strap a heavy rucksack to their backs.

What is the point of a Pilgrimage?

The purposes of pilgrimage are many and varied and are followed by Christian and non-Christian alike. Essentially it is to take time out of the ordinary, the routine or the mad rollercoaster that is life and take stock of where the individual is going.

What do I do on a pilgrimage?

Arguably there are five stages to a pilgrimage requiring the pilgrim to acknowledge change.

Letting go (What do I need let go of in preparing for pilgrimage?)

Setting off (Saying goodbye and turning your face towards the destination. Moving out of the comfort zone into the unknown)

The Journey (encountering hardships, different feelings, missing things, finding new things, encountering God)

Arriving (The satisfaction of arrival, sense of achievement, perhaps regrets of missed opportunities on the Journey)

Coming Back (Returning to home – Changed? Deciding to revert to the old self or embrace the new? Different priorities?)

Thinking about the reflections.

Much of a pilgrimage is about a personal encounter, both with God and with yourself. It is thinking about past experiences, it is thinking about how you feel, and it is exploring what you believe or what you understand. To get the most out of a Pilgrimage you have to be absolutely honest with yourself. The reflections that you are invited to ponder upon gives you the opportunity to take the time to move from the collective time together to personal thoughts. It is these occasions that possibly give you the greatest opportunity for spiritual growth. You are encouraged to engage with the reflections and see what happens.

In summary these times encourage:

- Personal thoughts to share only if you want to.
- Being absolutely honest with yourself about what you are thinking, God already knows.
- You to take time and space in the silence to let the questions roll around in your mind and see what comes up at the end.

Definitions of words that we will be using:

Church Tradition (This used to be known as “Churchmanship” but with a move towards being gender inclusive a more appropriate term is needed – Think of it in terms of the habits and practices of the church that you attend)

Churchmanship is a way of talking about and labelling different tendencies or schools of thought within the Church. The Church of England for example in particular is more often than not seen as a broad Church, embracing many different traditions of worship and style, from regalia, incense and acolytes to vicars in jeans and t shirt who say “Call me Jules.” People get pigeonholed, as Evangelical, Anglo-Catholics, Liberals, Charismatics, or a number of other titles, and often the divisions can be quite intense not to say confusing. So too the Methodist church has a range, all be it less wide, of traditions from “Traditional” (formal) to “Contemporary” (informal),

It can get quite complicated because entering the mix are views on which is more important Sacraments, Scripture or Sermons! None of which is wrong it is simply the way people connect with God in worship, and hopefully this pilgrimage will assist you in recognising your own preferences.

Spirituality

Spirituality is about relating to or affecting the human soul as opposed to material or physical things. While in churchmanship there are conversations around beliefs, rituals and church rules and all things tangible, spirituality is an individual’s preference that enables the person to connect with God. In other words what is it that either acts as an enabler or a distraction from coming close to God or allowing God to come close to the individual?

So, spirituality is a connection with the spirit, not as in ghosts, but as in the essence of being an individual human — your soul or your inner life, and what it is that you do that gives you the sense of getting close to God.

What this pilgrimage is focussing on.

The aim of this pilgrimage is to create the time and space to enter into a journey in the conscious company of God. In it we will be looking back to where we have come from and where we are now in terms of how coming to church has influenced and shaped our walk with God. We will develop our appreciation of how we can get close to Him through our Spirituality. At the same time, by exploring our understanding of our Churchmanship, we can see how we may be able to use our collective worship and time in church to assist us in seeking ways in which we can develop a more intimate bond with God. To use an age old adage let us “let go and let God”.

And so, we start our Pilgrimage.

We gather in the body of the church -Letting Go

We are here as intentional pilgrims, determined to allocate this time and tomorrow to spending time with God to the exclusion of much of the secular world.

Questions for quiet reflection.

What sacrifices have I made to come here today?

What fears do I have that I will need to overcome (such as being asked complicated questions, made to look foolish, letting go of something of my faith that I hold as comfortable)? Do I have a fear that I might have to change myself (my attitude, manner or mind set) in some way?

Do I speak a lot, but rarely listen to what God is saying to me? What do I need to let go of so that I can listen more to what God is saying to me?

At the door of the church - Setting off

Hymn

We love the place, O God,
wherein thine honour dwells;
the joy of thine abode
all earthly joy excels.

Questions for quiet reflection.

This may not be your usual church it may not be your usual denomination (Methodist, Anglican, URC, Baptist etc), but as we enter this sacred space, I invite you to think about the triangle that is you, God and your faith.

What does my church mean to me?

What do I expect from God, from others, from myself as I come into church on Sundays?

What do I hope / want / need to receive when I come into church on Sundays?

Is there anything in my regular Sunday worship that I find a distraction or irritating?

Is there anything in my regular Sunday worship that I particularly cherish?

What do I hope will be changed about me as I start this journey with God?

A short time for conversation and sharing

As we stand / sit among our fellow Christians / explorers – The Journey begins

Hymn

We love the house of prayer,
wherein thy servants meet;
and thou, O Lord, art there
thy chosen flock to greet.

Questions for quiet reflection.

What do my fellow Christians mean to me?

Could I spend my life worshiping God without human company?

Do I experience God's presence in church on a Sunday (or other times) and if so at what point during the act of worship do I feel closest to God? (Think of Sacraments, prayers, hearing the Bible read, listening to the sermon / Message, in the silence.... etc.)

Do robes, candles, incense, the service book words (if these things are used) act as a help or hindrance in my worship? Does the furniture or the plainness of a church building help or hinder my worship?

How do I get on with my fellow Christian? Is there anyone that I have difficulty engaging with? If so what do I need to do to put that right?

Look around here, or in your mind's eye look around your own church. What is it about this / my church that I find comfortable, distracting, reassuring, disturbing?

A short time for conversation and sharing.

As we gather around the font

Hymn

We love the cleansing sign
Of life through Christ our Lord,
Where with the name divine
We seal the child of God.

We renew our baptismal vows:

If there is one, then the Paschal candle is lit.

Those who are baptized are called to worship and serve God. Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society, by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak, and by seeking peace and justice?

With the help of God, I will.

May Christ dwell in your heart through faith, that you may be rooted and grounded in love and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. **Amen.**

Questions for quiet reflection.

What does my Baptism mean to me? How do I live my Baptism in my daily living?

Was I baptised as a child or an adult? Does this make a difference to me now?

As I have journeyed through this life are there times that I have neglected my Baptismal vows? If so think back to a recent occasion and ask; Where was God in that situation? What was it that took me off the path? What can I do to stop it happening again?

In Baptism we are born of the water and the spirit. What is my conception of the Holy Spirit?

"The Holy Spirit washes us clean". What does that mean to me?

How have I lived my life being faithful to Christ and being dead to sin? What changes must I make in my life for that to happen?

Make the sign of the cross on your forehead using a generous amount of baptismal water. What do I feel as my forehead is wetted? Can I sense the water running down my face? What is now going through my mind?

A short time for conversation and sharing.

As we gather around the Lectern

Hymn

We love the word of life,
the word that tells of peace,
of comfort in the strife,
and joys that never cease.

Questions for quiet reflection.

(This hymn from Singing the Faith (463) offers us a view on how the Bible, as the inspired word of God to us, has been constructed and transferred from an oral tradition to a written one)

1) Deep in the shadows of the past,
Far out from settled lands,
Some nomads travelled with their God
Across the desert sands.
The dawn of hope for humankind
Was glimpsed by them alone:
A promise calling them ahead,
A future yet unknown.

2) While others bowed to changeless gods
They met a mystery:
God with an uncompleted name,
"I am what I will be";
And by their tents, around their fires,
In story, song, and law
They praised, remembered, handed on
A past that promised more.

3) From Abraham to Nazareth
The promise changed and grew,
While some, remembering the past,
Recorded what they knew,
And some, in letters or laments,
In prophecy and praise,
Recovered, held, and re-expressed
New hope for changing days.

4) For all the writings that survived,
For leaders, long ago,
Who sifted, chose, and then preserved
The Bible that we know,
Give thanks, and find its promise yet
Our comfort, strength, and call,
The working model for our faith,
Alive with hope for all.

Brian Wren, 1973

What does the Bible mean to me? How well do I know it and what's in it? How would I fare in a Bible quiz?

Reading through this hymn, is there anything that resonates with me or anything that helps me understand what scripture is about?

The Bible is described as the inspired word of God written down by humans? Does this definition help me and why?

How often do I pick up the Bible just to read it? Is this often enough and if not why not, and what can I resolve to do about it?

Do I neglect the Old Testament? Is that because I don't understand it / I find it confusing / I think that it is boring? Does this matter and if so what can I do about it?

How do I feel as I hear the words of scripture read out on a Sunday?

A short time for conversation and sharing.

As we gather around the organ / piano

Hymn

We love to sing below
for mercies freely given;
but O we long to know
the triumph-song of heaven.

Questions for quiet reflection.

How important is music to me in worship?

It is said that “Methodists are born in song” (Think of people like Charles Wesley). If you are a Methodist is this true? “Anglicans use hymns to fill the space while servers are moving around etc” Is this fair? Why might there be a difference?

In what ways, if at all, does music (Hymns, responses etc and background playing) help me come closer to God? Does it help, or does it disturb the quiet?

How much do I concentrate on the words that I am singing? For example:

Are you washed in the blood?

In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?

Are your garments spotless; are they white as snow?

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

What do you make of the hymn "Washed in the Blood"? It was composed by the prolific Evangelical American writer Elisha Hoffman and published in 1878

It has been said that people leave church humming the tune of a hymn, but never leave church reciting the words of a sermon? Does music have more effect on me than I perhaps realise?

A short time for conversation and sharing

As we gather around the Altar / Communion Table to share in Communion

Hymn

We love the holy feast;
where, nourished with this food,
By faith we feed on Christ,
His body and his blood.

Questions for quiet reflection

What does the communion / Mass / Eucharist / Last Supper mean to me?

What do I understand happens to the bread and wine during the Eucharistic prayer?

What do I think about when I leave my pew / chair to come up for communion?

Christ died for me? Does that make me feel any different knowing that? How have I responded in my life to that wonderful gift from God?

‘Do this in remembrance of me’. Words we hear in the eucharistic prayer. Yes, we take communion but is Jesus asking me to do anything else “in remembrance of Him”?

How would I feel if I knew that (for whatever reason) this would be the last time that I took communion?

Does taking communion seem any different if I took it in another church or at the Cathedral?

A short time for conversation and sharing.

As we sit in our “usual” place in the pews (or equivalent place if you are from a different church)

Hymn

Lord Jesus, give us grace
on earth to love thee more,
in heaven to see thy face,
and with thy saints adore.

Questions for quiet reflection

How can I love Jesus more while I am on Earth?

If I pass away tonight what would I regret not doing most of all while I was alive?

If I pass away tonight what would I regret not doing most of all for God while I was alive?

Are the answers any different? Why that is? Do I have a different priority for my secular life and my spiritual life?

Has society changed? Do my friends and neighbours think more of this world than the next? Who is it that I can pray for, that they will find Jesus, and that they sit next to me here in the pew?

A time for conversation and sharing.

P.M. We move to another church with a different tradition, walking if we are able, and in silent reflection. This move brings in the sense of a journey, it gives us the space to think, and it enables us to take in our surroundings to recognise the hand of God in creation as we look around us (all be it rural, industrial or urban).

Conversation and reflection on the morning – issues, difficulties, things to share.

We move to a church that is different from the one that we gathered at this morning for two reasons.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly this pilgrimage is about the individual’s walk with God. We can become very attached to our church buildings (and rightly so) but there is a danger that our faith can become, to a certain extent, cloistered by the familiarity of our surroundings. We become accustomed to the furniture, the fabric even the ambience and temperature, and a bit like our

favourite armchair we can settle back into the service and lose the worship connection while we enjoy the familiarity connection. By worshipping in two different denominations, the focus then comes to two elements – The Pilgrim and God.

Secondly, because each Christian denomination has its own churchmanship, the absence of, or presence of different things will hopefully encourage thought around “Why’s that then”?

The Journey continues.

We need to remember that this is not an exercise in comparing church denominations in an academic way. This is a continuing journey in the conscious company of God to explore how we can get close to God through our Spirituality, and how, by developing our understanding of our Churchmanship, we can use our collective worship to assist us in seeking ways in which we can develop a more intimate bond with God.

For this afternoon we will build on what we have been thinking about this morning. This morning we were encouraged to think about our life thus far and the reflections guided us to think about how Church has shaped our lives and formed our churchmanship and spirituality. This afternoon will be looking forward considering the same elements but thinking much more about where the pilgrim travels from here, what changes need to be made in order to respond to God, and to reflect on our spirituality and churchmanship as we journey forward in the company of God.

For the second half of the day there will be a greater opportunity for conversation if you wish, or you can equally sit and listen and reflect on what others are saying.

Take time in silence to walk around or sit and look around the church. What do you notice that is different from the church that we were at this morning?

Questions for reflection.

What strikes me as different in this church, and what is similar compared to this morning?

If I worshipped regularly in a church of a different denomination what, if anything, would I miss?
How do I know that?

If I worshipped regularly in a church of a different denomination what, if anything, would I come to appreciate?

Is there anything in my reflections that surprises me?

A time for discussion or a time to listen to other pilgrims’ reflections.

As we gather around the font

Here is a font that is different from the one that I saw this morning. It may be different from the one that I was baptised in. As I study the differences, I ask myself:

Questions for reflection.

In what ways are the fonts different? Do those differences matter?

This morning I renewed my Baptismal vows and today I stand / sit by some furniture that looks different but actually serves exactly the same purpose – to initiate a new Christian into the life of the church.

If I were a new Christian today what would be the priorities in my life, and what old ways would I shed? How would I move forward in faith?

What sacrifices do I need to make in my life to live up to my Baptismal vows?

Which of the Baptismal vows will I find the easiest to keep, and which is the hardest?

A time for discussion or a time to listen to other pilgrims' reflections.

As we gather around the Lectern

I have “favourites” in all sorts of things, and perhaps I also have favourite bible passages or even books. That in itself is no bad thing as the passages can bring words of comfort. But I do also need to hear more of the bible, including the words of admonishment and the “boring” bits that I don’t understand because God gave me the bible in its entirety, and not just for me to cherry pick my favourite bits.

Questions for reflection.

Which books of the bible in particular don’t I understand?

What are the passages that I feel uncomfortable with when I hear them read?

How can I move forward to embrace the whole of the bible as God’s word to me?

What can I do to read the bible more and come to understand more of God’s word?
(Suggestions - resolve to read the bible in a year – there are lots of plans to help me do that, read and study the following Sunday’s readings during the week, study the readings in the pew sheet and find people to talk through the difficult bits with, take more time to talk to God in prayer about the bible.)

A time for discussion or a time to listen to other pilgrims' reflections.

As we gather around the organ / piano

Thinking of this morning's conversations, it is claimed that Methodists are "Born in song", and some of the most prolific hymn writers are Methodists. Perhaps any Methodists in the group can talk about their love of hymn singing. Do people prefer traditional or modern hymns? Would you prefer it if no hymns were sung at all?

Questions for reflection.

What is my favourite hymn? Why is it my favourite? Is it the tune or the words?

Do I think about the words of the hymn that I am singing and what they mean to my faith, or if they are based on bible verses?

How can I use the hymns, the sung responses and the other music in services to draw me deeper into the worship?

A time for discussion or a time to listen to other pilgrims' reflections.

As we gather around the Altar / Communion Table to share in Communion

Jesus instituted The Communion at His "Last Supper". Soon his followers were going to have to go out on their own and not be physically led by Jesus. We remember Jesus' teaching every time we share in the Eucharist.

Questions for reflection.

Is the Communion to me a stand-alone celebration and something that I join in with on Sunday, or is it more than that? If so what does sharing in Communion mean to me during the week?

In the Methodist Church the greater emphasis is on the word (Bible and sermon), with Communion being shared monthly, so the Communion table has a lower sense of presence than say the pulpit. Which is more important to me the word or the sacrament? Why is that?

What has had a greater importance on my daily life outside church and for the future, what will have a greater importance on my life?

A time for discussion or a time to listen to other pilgrims' reflections.

Arriving

Having set off and journeyed, having made sacrifices to come along to today, we are now at our outward journey's end.

We will all have different thoughts, emotions, experiences as we reach the end, even though we have come on pilgrimage together.

You may have had expectations when you set out that either have or have not been met. You may or may not have a sense of change in you.

Questions for reflection.

Take time now to reflect back on that journey, how you felt when you set off, how you felt on the way and how you feel now? Do you for example feel closer to, or more remote from God? Do you feel that your churchmanship has been challenged? Do you feel that your spirituality – your way of connecting with God – has shifted in a different direction?

In journeying has there been anything nagging at you that you have not been able to resolve?

Are there any unanswered questions?

You may well have some very different questions that you want to think about or seek answers for..... so take time.

Coming Back Questions for reflection.

All good things come to an end, so it is time to come back into our own world. But before we do its time to think about what has happened and to make decisions about anything that you plan to change for the future.

Have you recognised any different priorities in your life that you would like to set? If so how are you going to go about achieving that? What has got to go, and what is coming in its place?

Have you made any resolutions about your life that you would like to implement? Do you need any help or support in doing what you are planning to do? If so where are you going to get it from or can you achieve it by yourself?

Pilgrim Prayers

_Lord be with us this day,

Within us to purify us;
Above us to draw us up;
Beneath us to sustain us;
Before us to lead us;
Behind us to restrain us;
Around us to protect us. **Amen**

God of all creation,

we worship you as Lord.
God, you are ever close to us,
We rejoice to call you Father.
From this world's uncertainty
We look to you for strength.
Keep us one in your peace,
Secure in your love **Amen**

Dear, Chaste Christ,

Who can see into every heart
and read every mind,
Take hold of my thoughts.
Bring my thoughts back to me
And clasp me to yourself. **Amen**

Lord Jesus, you know us by name

And have called us to follow you;
Teach us how to respond anew
In every opportunity this day will bring.
We ask you this, you who love us
With the Father and the Spirit,
For ever and ever. **Amen**

O God, your name is blessed

From the rising of the sun
to its setting:
Fill our hearts with knowledge
Of yourself and our mouths
with your praise,
that from East to West
all may sing your glory,
with one voice and accord,

in Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Amen

Lord of Creation

Come Lord Christ, king of the earth,
Lead us as we walk with you
That the earth may be healed.

Come Holy Spirit, hovering over the
water

And guide us as we sail to you
That the waters may flow with life.

Come you Angels of the fire and light
And show us how to dance with you
That in the light may be born the
Flame of Love

Come you breath of the air
And inspire us with the breath of you
That the air may reverberate with the
Sound of the Word.

Come, Lady Mary and the saints of
heaven
And help us to pray with you,
That the earth may be redeemed through
The Love of Christ. **Amen**

Kindle in our hearts, O God,

The flame of love that never ceases,
That it may burn in us, giving light to
others.

May we shine for ever in your temple,
set on fire with your eternal light.
For the glory of the holy Trinity. **Amen**

May God the Father bless us;

May Christ take care of us;
May the Holy Spirit enlighten us
all the days of our lives.

The Lord be our defender
And keeper of body and soul
Both now and for ever, **Amen**