



Reflections on a Personal Pilgrimage

By Rev Robin Trew

**Part paper, part shared pilgrimage.
Some reflections and some questions to share.**

In May 2014 I started a Pilgrimage from Iona to Lindisfarne as part of a sabbatical from my role as Rector of Allesley, a suburban church in Coventry and as Area Dean of Coventry North Deanery. This paper is my own reflection on that journey.

Writing this reflection prompted a lot of questions – questions you may find helpful in reflecting on your own pilgrimage, wherever you are, and whatever you are doing. As you read, take time and pray. Maybe write down your own experience and reflect on your own lessons in life and journey of following Jesus. If used in a small group, consider your own personal journey and compare notes when you come together.

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“We see the world not as it is, but as we are” *Talmud*

“Let everything be Amen and Alleluia” *Augustine*

Preamble

Having been Rector of Allesley for twelve years and an Area Dean for three years I had become aware of a need to step back and take a fresh look at my working life. Was it just my advancing years - I was about to be 62 after all? Am I on the home straight as far as work goes? Was it time for a sabbatical? Yes.

One of my personal worries is the fear of not having the energy to lead the church well. I dread just going through the motions. From comments I have heard from other ageing clergy this is quite a common fear. I wondered "Am I still doing something that God is calling me to do?"

As we, and the world around us change, how do we keep a healthy understanding of who we are and what our purpose is in life?

Are you comfortable with your time of life?

What questions do you ask yourself when you think about your next five years?

What are the things that wear you down and which seem hard to resolve?

How do you deal with feelings of weariness and cynicism?

Are you still finding time to pray?

Pilgrimage

This paper is a reflection on my recent sabbatical Pilgrimage walk from Iona to Lindisfarne. I call Pilgrimages "journeys to the heart of God". There are different sorts of pilgrimage. Traditionally it means walking or riding to a holy place but travel is not always possible or necessary. You could embark on other intentional actions which would enable you to reflect on your life – reading, writing, photography, study, an artistic or altruistic project.

For me Pilgrimage means placing myself in a situation where I must depend on God for the day to day necessities and appreciate again the reality that He really is my Father. This leads to an interesting tension between planning and being open to whatever happens. In 2001 I had walked the Camino Frances from the French Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela and learnt to "seize the blessing of the day" i.e. whatever God supplied was to be accepted, appreciated and enjoyed eschewing the modern pattern of choice and consumerism. The Camino has a long history and is very popular among all sorts of people. You walk in the company of pilgrims from all sorts of backgrounds and with all sorts of agendas and there is a ready infrastructure of way-marked paths, hostels, refreshments and facilities which have built up around the pilgrim trade. You are rarely alone on the track. (see www.csj.co.uk)



This time I wanted to walk across my own country on my own. I knew something of the history of the Celtic church which linked the monastery at Iona with that at Lindisfarne and I decided that this would make a good three hundred mile pilgrimage walk. I was a bit surprised to find that it was not already an established long distance path but by linking other walks such as the West Highland Way, Clyde Walkway and St. Cuthbert's Way together and seeking help from the internet I came up with a plan.

This time I decided that I would seek sponsorship for a local charity “The Laura Centre” trying to establish a place for bereavement counselling for children and their families in Coventry. I set up the web page (www.pilgrimways.org) and the donation site. I planned an itinerary. I bought some expensive lightweight equipment - this walk would need me to carry camping gear. And I handed over my church responsibilities with a cheerful heart. I believe in empowering leadership!



I set out for the island of Iona where St.Columba had established that first toehold in Scotland and explored the Abbey and the Isle from my lovely hostel base at the north of the island.



*What other ways could people embark on Pilgrimages without walking?
Do you feel that you are part of a supportive community - as on the Camino?
How important for you would contact with other people be on a pilgrimage ?
Do you enjoy taking risks in life and faith?*

Paths and Borderlands

Paths connect us with community. One of the blessings of my previous pilgrimage walks on the Camino Frances in Spain was to experience walking in the footsteps of the saints



and pilgrims whose feet have forged, preserved and imprinted the Way for a thousand years. It makes you part of the community. Your feet make a contribution to guide and encourage those who will come after you. You are thankful to those who have established and maintained the way. One Refuge, manned by volunteers from a Dutch evangelical church serves a free meal to all pilgrims. As you leave there is a collecting bowl with the words: "Yesterday's Pilgrims were your hosts. Tomorrow's will be your guests." In Spain, the communities that have sprung up along the route have been germinated by the pilgrims, sustained by them and maintain a symbiotic relationship of which you become a part by your participation. All this is so fruitful for spiritual reflection. Plus - those old guys knew a thing or two and probably picked the best and easiest ways. Scotland is different.

There is no historic path. In fact crossing the Isle of Mull there was no path at all as I decided to wild camp along the beautiful and rugged southern shores. There are different lessons to learn on different pilgrimages.



Surprise! I found pathless navigation difficult and unpleasant.

I had pictured myself as a brave wilderness traveller, using my map and compass to forge a pathway across the uncharted beauty and relishing being independent and unfettered by convention or rules. I would pitch my tent wherever fancy took me and sit under the stars with my hot tea. It turned out that the pathless map and compass, find your own way approach loved by the romantic child reared on the Wild West Frontier and appealing to the apostolic boldly-go-where-no-one-has-gone-before dream - was a bit of a nightmare. The more so because it was supposed to be so liberating and I found it frustrating and oppressive. Everywhere I wanted to go seemed blocked by crags, ravines, bogs, fences, impenetrable scrub or impassable streams. And so much staring at the compass that I had no eyes for the beauty of the nature through which I was travelling oh so slowly. Solitude was overwhelmed by uncertainty and the sense of being foolishly out of my depth. It turns out - I like paths!



So, after one day of walking and camping wild I found myself making poor progress on the second morning and I had to face the fact that I was either being feeble, or sensible and recognising my limitations, and turned back to the track and road route. I found myself singing "Not for ever by still waters would I idly quiet stay but would smite the living water from the rocks along the way" despite the fact that the living water was managing to bubble up from the rocks around me with no smiting required whatsoever and that some still waters sounded rather attractive to me. And "Not for ever in green pastures do we ask our way to be; but the steep and rugged pathway may we tread rejoicingly." with a rather desperate need for a pathway, however rugged. David Adam, in his book "Occasions for Alleluias", my chosen reading material, has some challenging words about what he calls "Borderlands" - the places of uncertainty and challenge where we can all the more

easily encounter God. Where, taken out of our cocoon of technology and controlled environments we can meet with God in creation in a more risky environment.

In my other companion book, Michael Mitton's "Restoring the Woven Cord" we read of the Celtic saints' attachment to creation - perhaps rooted in their pre-Christian pagan druidism. For them the creator God was a naturally fruitful model as they sought wild places, mountains, cliffs, islands and storms following the example of their beloved desert Fathers in seeking out isolated places where they could expect to encounter the living creator. The antithesis of this David Adam calls the "Midlands" where all is safe, calm, controlled by us and where there is no peril. David Adam has obviously not been in Coventry Precinct late on a Friday night or early Saturday morning - but I note with chagrin that I am a "midlander". We are safe people, anxious to avoid danger or uncertainty and not to provoke offence.

When things got difficult and I faced some awkward decisions I felt challenged not to give up the tent and resort to B&Bs and not to use public transport or to return home for my MGB but still to seek the Borderlands where a pilgrim might encounter the heart of God. To live within one's capabilities, to stick to what one knows is very sensible but it is not the "life in all it is fullness" that Jesus promised. Risk and peril where there is no actual pain or failure is no risk at all but a fairground ride of pretend danger. Perhaps we have to try and fail from time to time to time in order to grow? Perhaps failure is the new success!



*Who were "yesterdays pilgrims" for you? Whose path have you followed and who has provided for you? When have you followed a well trodden path in life – and when have you braved the heather and bog?
Where do you go to find solitude?
Jesus promises "Life in all its fullness" which bits do you instinctively avoid?
Are you by nature a Borderlander or a Midlander. Are you happy about that?
When have you taken risks and discovered the joy of relying on God?*

Failure

I had hoped that in my solitude I would have times of inspiration from the beauties of creation and times of elation from overcoming of obstacles as well as some holy moments as I followed the footsteps of the Celtic Saints, particularly Aiden and Cuthbert. What could possibly go wrong?

On my second morning I found myself hammering up the main road through the Ross of Mull, trying to make up lost time when my foray into the borderlands of pathless navigation had to be abandoned due to my lack of skill and nerve. In my frustration I neglected to look after my feet as a good pilgrim should. Damp socks and ignored hot spots left me with bad blisters on the balls of both feet which resulted in my hobbling painfully into Craignure on the third day.



My three week walk had come to a shuddering halt in the A&E ward of Craignure Hospital which was conveniently placed right by my ferry terminal. The staff were charming, professional but brutally honest. "Well you're not going to be doing that." was the response to my explanation of my pilgrimage plan. Rest was the only cure. So it meant that I had to spend four nights in a B&B in Oban to allow the blisters to heal and then had to do a section of the "walk" on the train to catch up. What could I possibly learn from such a mundane failure when my aspirations were so holy? Well, quite a few things, in fact.

Lying on the bed in A&E in Craignure, Mull as I heard the verdict. "3-5 days off your feet is the only way. Listen to your body." I, who prided myself on never having blisters, was being forced to rethink my plans by two of them. One on the ball of each foot. My pilgrimage across the country seemed doomed. If I couldn't fulfil my planned "journey to the heart of God" across Scotland how wee God and I to meet? How could I still be on pilgrimage if I couldn't walk? What do the people of God in the face of failure?

Sara laughed at the strangers' promise in Genesis 18:12. She had lived with this promise for so long and it was a failure. How often the prophets were ridiculed and ignored when the people of God had had their expectations of God dashed were called upon one more to trust him. The wisdom literature is full of reflections of a people whose experience of life called into question the simple justice of Psalm 1 where the good are blessed and the wicked perish. Their question as to whether God is still with us in times of weakness and failure - not just as a rescuer in the wings or as one waiting for us to get back on track - but right where we are, is at the heart of our faith still.

It seems to me that Jesus had times of failure too. There were those places where he could "do no mighty work among them" Mark 6:5 and when the followers he had gathered turned back and he had to ask the twelve "are you leaving too?" John 6:66-68. And what about "Eli, eli, lama sabachthani, Matthew 27:46?" Maybe to be fully human is to fail sometimes.

Perhaps God allows us to make mistakes in order to teach us something important. One of



the lessons that failure is often proposed to teach us is "if it first you don't succeed, try, try, try again" Anyone who has watched a bluebottle try to fly through a pane of glass understands that persistence is no guarantee of success.

We are told to learn from our mistakes. Once I grasped that I need to look after my feet, not try to make up lost time, wash my socks and take risks, should I not be free to resume my journey unhindered? Perhaps if we learn the lesson of failure quickly we can move on to success right away? However there are no shortcuts. God's people are not immune to the consequences of their own, or other people's sin

or failure. It turns out that there are no things to do to your body that will remove the need for rest and recovery. No bursting, no draining, no cutting, no false skin will bring healing to a blister. Oh it might enable you to go on with the pretence that you are strong, succeeding, overcoming - but further damage or infection will be the result. Your body knows what it needs and if you listen to it it will bring healing. It is in the design.

If it were not for my timetable then I could rest and then continue - but I do have a timetable. Other people are depending on me. That is part of the anguish of failure - that it impacts on the expectations and the lives of those around us. And what about my pride and my humiliation? I had failed to complete my planned pilgrimage.

It was my wife who explained to me that I was still on Pilgrimage, of course.

“Pilgrimage is about accepting whatever happens and seeking God in that, isn't it? Well this is just one of the things that happen.”

Don't you just hate it when “they” are right?

Pilgrimage is about a rational decision to put yourself into a position where you can encounter God in a more tangible way. So perhaps it is not fanciful to try to see God in all the things that happen. Where is God in these blisters? Blisters are very personal. My grand scheme of crossing the country on foot, of raising money for a worthy cause, of leading by example have quickly been brought to focus on me and my feet. God, it seems, thinks that these small things matter. I matter to God. Resting is not wasting time if we rest with God.

How do we welcome failure and the interruption of our plans?

How do we embrace the reality of chance and failure as an opportunity for recreation?

How comfortable are you with the idea of Jesus failing sometimes?

Why should you not give up when you fail – and when should you?

What have you learnt from a failure?

How can a failure be good even if you don't overcome it?

How much of the pain of failure is about letting others down and how much is about dented pride?

When have you ever encountered God in failure?

Resting

“Come apart to a desert place and rest awhile” Mark 6:31. “Come apart and rest awhile; if you don't rest awhile you'll soon come apart.” I remember a talk at college saying that this was advice given to a young Jung. In “Occasions for Alleluias” David Adam says “Fullness of life is rooted in the ability to rest and the courage to let go and allow ourselves to attend to what is about us.” We are all too often living for the future these days and neglect to live in the present. And God is in the present. “Men go abroad to wonder...and they pass by themselves without wondering” Augustine, Confessions X8. We make a five year business plan or mission plan, we arrange our pension or life assurance, we endlessly discuss the retirement plans - and we forget to live now. We feel that resting will delay our pursuit of these worthy goals but resting is about noticing what is. This is where God is now. Resting is active and creative. The inner demons tell us it is wasting time.

I arrived downhearted in Oban at my unwanted B&B for the enforced 4 nights of inactivity. No walking. Get well soon. I went in and left my bag as the room was being cleaned. So I hobbled into town

to look around and fill the time. I did a bit of shopping. I went and found the laundry which I was told would be closed - it was open for another hour. So I hobbled back to the B&B and got my washing bag and hobbled back to the laundry. I meandered painfully down to the harbour. I wandered up to the church where I might go tomorrow. I looked in the charity shops for some cheap sandals - because my feet were really sore. I went into the Columba Hotel for a coffee and a sit down and thought about going to look for some lunch and just like the rich man in the parable I heard the voice in my head.

“You fool!” Luke 12:20.

I was not here to fill in time. Time was not the cure. I was to engage in creative resting. So I forced myself to stay still and eat a panini.

Resting is an intentional, decisive, therapeutic action.

If we say “I’d love to rest but I really just don’t have the time with all the important and urgent things I have to do” we are really saying that none of those things are important enough or urgent enough to do properly with our full attention and commitment.

One of my favourite pilgrimage quotes is an ancient one warning those who think that they will gain great things by exerting themselves to visit holy shrines - “To go is much trouble, little profit. You will not find the king you seek unless you take Him with you”.

What is your plan for resting?

Do you have a balance in life of Rest and Action.

Do you rest after all the jobs are done or before you start?

Is resting a luxury for you or an essential?

Why do people find it hard to justify resting?

Angels and Demons

Angels are around us, demons within. People are spiritual beings. People who help us are those who minister to us. Hebrews 1:14 says that “all angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation”. So it is with an intentional reinterpretation of this verse that I like to include all who coincidentally or serendipitously appear in my situation and bring help or guidance or encouragement as “Angels”.

Whether these are in fact beings who are outside of the earthly realms that I inhabit is really of no great importance to me. It is still God whom I encounter.



The Celtic church has quite a lot to say about the realm of angels and demons. Is this merely because they are writing in a pre scientific age and use this language to fill in the cracks of understanding or is there more to it? We largely grow up in the west with a scientific materialism which seeks to explain all things in it is own terms and where that understanding fails to reassure us, that further research will provide all answers. This tends towards an individualistic and egocentric attitude to life and to faith - it is all about me. Even Christians are sold the idea of an essentially personal faith where the one to one

relationship with God is all important. Other people, even other Christians, become extras in our own drama. In this world view creation becomes merely a stage, as Shakespeare says, on which our lives are played out and our own relationship with God developed. In this God can all too easily become the audience or even the X-factor judge. Our life becomes a training exercise for the life that is to come. So we are sad when a loved one dies but we comfort ourselves that they are “gone to a better place” or that they are “now with the Lord”. Heaven, and not the “fallen corrupt” earth, is the “real” life. Celtic teaching was much more creation affirming than this.

God and His angels inhabit the here and now. Good and evil spiritual beings are active and effective in the world now.

I met with no external demons that I was aware of but there were plenty of inner ones to wrestle with. Angels are another matter. Here are a few.

- The Megabus driver on my first day, who had been grumpily abusing passengers with overweight cases, turned into a charming source of information and saved me from staying on the bus in Glasgow and thus inadvertently visiting Aberdeen instead of Oban, even insisted on walking me across the bus station to the correct bus and informing the new driver where I was going - like a ten year old in an Enid Blyton story.
- The Ferryman who remarked as I walked down the ramp onto the Iona Ferry with my backpack in its yellow waterproof. “Oh I thought you had a halo there for a minute!”
- The leader of the “pilgrimage” on Iona who read Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” - taking me back to my elocution exam piece.
- The mysterious green clad figure who appeared on the skyline as I waded through a pathless morass on the first morning on Mull and so helped me to find the path and who I saw again later having managed to lose the path and find the wrong beautiful beach. And who was not there at the end of the one way track to the right beach.
- The Old Smithy on my weary road walk to Glen Mor where I got a warm welcome and a hot meal and encouragement to go on - and then when I told them about my pilgrimage, returned my money plus a bit more for the Laura Centre.
- The overheard conversation of the compassionate lady farmer agonising over her decision to care for 7 orphaned “pet-lambs” from her flock and particularly one with a joint disease which she had been nursing are wondering if she was doing it any favours.
- Finding wise, compassionate and local help at A&E on Mull.
- The lady at the HOPE Kitchen (Help Our People Eat) in Oban who spent her time energy and money feeding the unloved in Oban.
- The janitor at the block of flats in Glasgow who stopped me retracing my steps on the Kelvin Walkway (why don’t they have N and S on the signposts!)
- The lady in the old Fiesta at Biggar who nearly ran me over reversing back down the road to offer me a lift as I was steeling myself for the last mile of road pounding into town and worrying about blisters.
- Daphne who found me a little weary on a bench at St.Boswells. It emerged that she was ordained and retired on ill health with probable stress related issues. We had a lovely conversation about ministry, family life, the need to persist in praying for the conversion of loved ones, and of God’s faithfulness. We had a common appreciation of David Adam and Celtic spirituality. Her hug and blessing left me uplifted and refreshed.
- The two Scots lads who caught up with me over the well named Wide Open Hill in a downpour and were suitably impressed by my derring-do and who kept me company - and increased my pace - until the rain stopped.

- The Tesco Van driver who despaired of explaining the way to my B&B and took me in his van from the outskirts of Wooler.

Now I can rationalise all this as a response to my personal charm and charisma, coincidence, wishful thinking, someone changing their jacket, or I can choose to see angels in these things. "Some have welcomed Angels unawares." Hebrews 13:2. The help is the same though. It is not just romanticism or whimsy. It is about accepting that God is present here and now and that all of creation is inhabited by God's life and Spirit. Thus we may encounter Him through many channels if we are open to the Amen and Alleluias. "Amen" when we see anything that evidences the presence and activity of a loving, redeeming creator. An urge to take creative or redemptive action when we are unable to say "Amen" to what is around us. "Alleluia" when we intentionally attend to this creative or redemptive activity and turn to God in praise and thanksgiving. Creation is more than the stage on which we move and which we are called to care for. It is even more imperative that we play our full part in it is healing and productivity for this is the place of the presence of God - the place of Glory.

What "Angels" have you encountered in the last month?

Are there any "Demons" that you struggle with?

Make a list of 10 "Amen" from today and say some Alleluias for them.

How have you, or could you, enable more Amens by your actions?

Creation

God is the creator. It is important that we do not fall into the trap of seeing that creative activity coming to an end on day 6 or 7 of the Genesis accounts. That picture of a perfect creation and the creator stepping back to admire it like a neat piece of DIY, thereafter keeping a watching brief and occasionally tweaking reality to keep things on track. For me it is more and more plain that the work of creation is an ongoing work.

The world in which we live is not part of a spoilt perfection (wherever that spoiling might spring from) whose story is all about being redeemed and restored. This is an ongoing process of life being made new. The creator is actively creating as the redeemer is actively redeeming all around us. We are made in the image of God to be creative too. We too are to be seeking to create and restore godly life wherever we are. This is the call of "Amen and Alleluia". It is a call of faith. We believe with Julien of Norwich that "all manner of things will be well".



As we understand that God is active in creation all around us we can expect God to meet us in creation in our everyday living and working. When creation speaks to us of God it is not only a metaphor but an encounter. When we engage in creativity we are acting out our "Amen" to his presence. In Oban I looked into the window of a small tourist gallery - some cute pictures of puppies, children - even midges and wonder if this is creativity? But there are watercolours of sea and lake views nearly all showing land and sky reflected in water. Why is that so attractive? Why do such scenes prompt us to reach for the camera and capture the moment? Perhaps it is the symmetry? We are creatures of two halves. Right

and Left brains, hands, feet. And we are those who pray for God's will "on earth as in heaven". The more clear the reflection of heaven is in earth the more we can cry "Amen and Alleluia". This call to creativity is not the preserve of the gifted alone. When we are not creating we are just consuming and destroying. One challenge is to use ones creative skills, whatever they may be from music or poetry to cooking or gardening, not to make a masterpiece but to seek to encounter God. I had a go at poetry. The exercise is to look around and attend to what you see. Then write your creative first thoughts. Don't over-think it.

The green brown morass of empty harbour
bracketed by sea and traffic noise
Inhabited by unseen crabs and takeaway debris
Bursts into raucous life.
The gulls
Swarming, swooping
Clamouring, calling
Drawn by stale bread arcing through the air.

Eyes shining, the boy throws aggressively.
This seed bears quick fruit and the gulls fight tug-of-war.
The loudest callers miss their chance.
The fastest eat in fear, hounded by their jealous companions,
swallowing huge chunks they stand with distended necks, gulping.
And when the bread is gone, so are they and their benefactor.
Only I pedantically note that some are yellow legged, some pink.
It makes no difference.

Now this is not designed to be great literary art - it is an exercise. Having sketched this out I must ask "How does this speak of God. How does God speak through it to me?"
I note the following random thoughts:

- There is a vibrancy to the link between the feeder and the fed - a shared excitement. Both are receiving. I recall that there rejoicing among the angels when one sinner repents.
- I remember that Bernard of Clairvaux talks about us being a reservoir rather than a canal for God's love. We must collect and store it within us, let it create us, before we can pass it on to others. Just throwing bread is not caring for the birds.
- I reflect that bird watching - which I have embarked on in a small way lately - has a pattern where you look out from a hide and see nothing. Then by persisting in giving the scene your attention for twenty minutes you start to see what was there all along. If you have not thought "Nothing here" and moved on looking for instant gratification, that is.
- David Adam says that his pattern of prayer is PACTS - Pause, Adore, Confess, Thank, Supplicate - and if you only have ten minutes to pray, spend nine on Pause.
- To Saunter (the name I give to a leisurely pilgrimage) comes from the latin "Sante terra" i.e. Holy Land. It is not that the land towards which you move is "Holy" it is appreciating the holiness of the land through which you move. Moses was told "take off your shoes for you are standing on holy land."

- This ability to see what is right there in front of us is referred to in the Talmud “We see the world not as it is, but as we are”. The light reflected from the world around us strikes our eyes and is converted to electrical impulses but the step of perception owes much to our own nature and experiences. What we perceive may well reveal as much about what we are as about what we are looking at. One person’s beautiful field of ripe corn dotted with scarlet poppies is a retired farmer’s embarrassing public demonstration of poor agriculture.

This exercise enables us to come alongside the presence of God in these things. It is not a direct analytical confrontation in which we try to see a “real meaning” in something ordinary. It is more that we appreciate that God is at work in and around us and can be encountered if we pay attention. More like a child who has been playing whilst a parent is engaged in some task will saunter over and ask comfortably, “What are you doing, Mummy?”.

As I resumed my walk, blisters healed, I had to catch up on time missed and so the stretch along the West Highland Way had to be accomplished on a train. I sat and marvelled at the scenery with a mixture of sadness, relief, guilt and regret that I was not going to walk through these mountains, hills and lochs this time. And I realised that sitting, looking and marvelling was not time wasting. We do not dance on creation, we dance with creation. These geological rhythms are our beat.

*Do you see creation as a spoilt perfection or as a work of perfecting in progress?
Try the creativity exercise yourself:*

- *Stop and look around you for ten minutes. Pay attention to details.*
- *Write a poem, draw or paint something, dance a dance whatever means of creativity appeals to you. Don't let lack of talent hold you back this is or your eyes only. Just try to express what comes into your mind.*
- *Look at what you created and ask: “How does this speak of God. How does God speak through it to me?”*



Stress

Carrying more than we need is not only uncomfortable it is damaging to our spiritual, emotional and physical health. Reflecting on why I should suffer blisters it occurred to me that I was not used to carrying backpacking equipment. Following the advice I have freely issued to others I unpacked my bag and only repacked things that were essential if I were to be able to continue. A single change of clothes. Out went spare jumper, waterproof trousers and long johns. Out went the washbag, stove, saucepan, lighter, knife fork spoon and emergency rations. Out went the midge cream and washing up liquid. Not much really - but it weighed 2.5kg when I posted it home. That was stress on my feet that I didn't need. So no hot drinks or cooked food. No warm layer for sleeping. No protection from midges. I pondered losing the tent and sleeping mat but that meant using B&B's all the way which would have put a crimp on my freedom and budget and I was jealous of the freedom to choose each day. Pilgrim faith means letting go of the "just in case", accepting limitations on our comfort and risking doing without. I started walking again heading south towards Glasgow on the river paths that follow the Kelvin which flows into the Clyde. These were much more familiar way-marked paths and I made good progress with cautionary stops for foot inspection and cooling off. How would my body cope with the stress of walking now?



David Adam uses the illustration of a bow to talk about stress. If you keep a bow strung it loses elasticity and needs to be tightened day by day until eventually it snaps. You need to un-string it to prolong its life. Rest or snap appear to be the choices. I love my Ovation 12 string guitar which I bought when I was a rich optician. "De-tune it" was the advice so that the neck will not bow too much and ruin the action. Stress in good in a bow or a guitar - but too much stress is catastrophic. People are the same.

Challenge and stress will release adrenaline which enable us to act with more energy and achieve great things - but constant stress will cease to produce the same effect. We need periods of rest so that our bodies and minds can rise joyfully and effectively to the challenges we face. Some of the stress we carry around comes from things that may never happen, or things that we will not be able to do anything about anyway. We need to let these things go. Bitterness, resentment, anger, revenge, self recrimination or guilt are all dead weight on our backs. We need to unpack and ask "Do I need this today? Will I be able to do anything about this today?" If not, post it home and walk with a lighter tread. Later, reassured that my feet were truly restored, I resumed my walk along the Clyde through Glasgow City centre, past the building work for the Commonwealth Games, and out through Strathclyde park to New Lanark, Biggar, Peebles, and on to Minch Moor I realised that experience tells us what stress is comfortable. Going onto the moor where I was out of reach of refreshments I added 2 buns, 4 apples, a packet of custard creams and a bar of chocolate because I would be wild camping on the moor. I was aware of the pack's extra weight, small though it was. Probably unavoidable but it made the rests and the bag adjustments more critical. We often excuse the accumulation of stress with the thought that "it is unavoidable" or "it is only a few ounces" but we need to be aware of what our body tells us. Walking past a garage I noticed this sign. "Warning light? Don't motor on - STOP and have a diagnostic test here." Taking the bulb out of your oil warning light will not stop your engine seizing up. I speak as one who knows.





*What are the effects of stress on you at the moment?
What is there that you worry about that you can't do anything about?
How could you "put this down"?
What could you do to "unbend the bow" regularly?
Do you have any "warning lights" on your dashboard?*

Amen and Alleluia

Art installation on Minch Moor where irregular shapes are cut into the heather which only appear circular if you look from a particular viewpoint.



An art installation on the moor is glimpsed as large irregular shapes in

the heather which pique the curiosity. Is it science? Is it vandalism? Is it a weird Scottish equivalent of crop circles? Not until you get to the right viewpoint is the art revealed. Augustine says "Let everything be Amen and Alleluia" This is more than just seeing the metaphors of God in the beauty of creation and more than mere woolly loveliness, it is about acknowledging that God is as present in creation as we are. We need to stop and look attentively for all that we can say "Amen" to. Our agreement, our "so be it" to what has been created. The Talmud says "We see the world not as it is, but as we are". One person looking over a hillside scattered with sheep and lambs will see a heavenly vision of purpose fulfilled, pasture found and life burgeoning. Another will see separation of parent and child, danger, exposure and a looming abattoir. We see the world not as it is, but as we are. When you get to the explanation of the artwork you are faced with a small hole to look through. Only from here do all the shapes become true circles. This is the Resolution Point. Only from here can you see through the creator's eyes.

The paths I had chosen involved going through Melrose – the site of Cuthbert's Celtic monastery and joining the St. Cuthbert's Way. Cuthbert was sent to lead the Celtic monks at Lindisfarne. It was something of a disappointment to investigate the Carmelite monastery ruins at Melrose and to realise that the much older Celtic monastery had been some miles away. When my 3 year old grandson came to visit from New Zealand he pointed excitedly at the church that abuts the Rectory wall and said "Look at that castle!". And there is the difference between the Celtic monks and the later monastic foundations. This "castle", with its territory, industry and eventual secular economic power speaks of a different approach to creation. I think that the Celtic understanding would mirror that of many indigenous peoples – the land does not belong to us. We belong to the land. This understanding that creation, here and now, is the place of the presence of God, the place of glory, rather than some future heaven changes the way we look at it and care for it.

How would the idea of God's glory being here and now change the way you look at the world?

"We see the world not as it is, but as we are". How much does your story colour how you see the world? Are you a "glass half full" or a "glass half empty" person?

What more could you do to "look attentively" at creation so as to see God's presence.

Preening

As I approached St.Cuthbert's Cave nearing the end of my journey on St.Cuthbert's Way from Melrose to Lindisfarne I was surprised to see it so big and also to see a fire burning and smoke emerging from it. I thought I saw a figure moving into the cave and I assumed that some hippy was camping out there. I almost passed by, not wanting to intrude but a bit put out. But then I thought that I should be open to a conversation at least, so I pressed on up to the cave with a



cheery "Hello there!" as I peered in. No one there. Just a wisp of smoke perhaps? Another angel? So I sat on a convenient rock by the door and ate my meagre lunch. I wondered if Cuthbert himself might have sat here? (I hadn't done my research which would have informed me that it is called St. Cuthbert's cave because it is where the fleeing monks of Lindisfarne had rested the bones of St. Cuthbert that they were rescuing from the Vikings.) It definitely had a spiritual atmosphere about it.

As I sat a robin came and perched on the big rock about 12 feet in front of me and looked me in the eye. I greeted him as I have been in the habit of doing. Robins often appear at the start of a days walk and assure me that I am on the right path. That's what comes of sharing a name. However he flew off and was replaced by a pied wagtail who also looked me in the eye. He then proceeded to preen and tidy his feathers with great attention to detail. It went on for ten minutes or more, painstakingly perfecting his black and white face, breast, wings, and tail - leaving nothing out. It seemed to be telling me that caring for oneself is important, not for show, reputation or competition, but for function. This wagtail needed to be in peak condition so that it could fly. So do I. "Care for yourself" it seemed to say "So that you can do all that God asks of you."

Then you can fly.

Then you can see for miles.

Then you can give proper attention to God in creation.

"I will look for the Lord with eye of heart.

This - is the place of Glory."



As you have read through this paper and addressed some of the questions, you too have been undertaking a pilgrimage.

There is nothing here about reaching the end.

There is no waiting for the tide to recede

There is no walk across the sands.

There is no final epiphany.

Those are not the end of the pilgrimage for pilgrimage never ends.

The journey to the heart of God goes on forever.

*Robin Trew
Coventry*

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