

Grace Episcopal Church  
Proper 5, Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Rev Brian C Justice

Psalm 50.7-15  
Hosea 5.15-6.6  
Romans 4.13-25  
Matthew 9.9-13, 18-26

### On Pilgrimage

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at a tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

I've always wondered about that.  
Maybe because it has never happened to me quite like that.  
A man walks by, calls me, and - without hesitation, seemingly without thought -  
*I abandon everything in my life*, and follow the man.  
Just like that.

Was it something about Jesus?  
Certainly.  
Was it something inside of Matthew?  
Certainly.  
But still ... I search for an explanation.

In his essay entitled "From Pilgrimage to Crusade," Thomas Merton writes

"Man instinctively regards himself as a wanderer and wayfarer, and it is second nature for him to go on pilgrimage in search of a privileged and holy place, a center and source of indefectible life. This hope is built into his psychology, and whether he acts it out or simply dreams it, his heart seeks to return to a mythical source, a place of origin, the home where the ancestors came from, the mountain where the ancient fathers were in direct communication with heaven, the place of the creation of the world, paradise itself, with its sacred tree of life."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, "From Pilgrimage to Crusade." This essay is included in *Mystics and Zen Masters*. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux. New York: 1961. p. 91.

Perhaps Jesus awakened in Matthew the natural instinct “to go on pilgrimage in search of a privileged and holy place ... a center ... a source of indefectible life.”

Perhaps Matthew recognized that Jesus was The Way to that place, that center, that indefectible life.

When Matthew was taking his first steps with Jesus, did he then doubt who – or what – he was following? Did the thought “what have I gotten myself into?” occur to him?

If it did, then he found out right away what he had gotten himself into.

Jesus immediately takes Matthew to a house full of Romans and whores where Jesus promptly proceeds to break all of the social and dietary laws of their shared Jewish faith, saying only, Those who are well need no physician.

From there, Jesus is beckoned by a desperate man and so they leave for another house where he heals the man’s daughter and an unclean woman who is bleeding.

And on they went.

That thought “what have I gotten myself into?” just might have occurred to Matthew one more time!

But Matthew is learning.

The Way to “the holy place” ... to the “center and source of indefectible life” is The Way of servant ministry. It is compassion and care for others, particularly those people whom his culture labelled “other” and “less than” like Romans and prostitutes and tax collectors and dead daughters and bleeding women.

If Matthew learned this is what following Jesus really means, then we are learning this, too.

In our own day, we may feel like wanderers and wayfarers, like pilgrims in search of the holy place, as so many principles and priorities and courtesies and decencies have seemingly been lost.

And many people are saying to us, Follow me.

But we can know whether or not that call or any call is a call to pilgrimage in imitation of Christ:

Is it a call to welcome the outcast? To serve the sick? Is it to heal the broken-bodied and the broken-hearted? Is it to tell the truth? Is it to repair the breach?

If the one who says to you “follow me” is leading you to that, then go.

You are on The Way towards “home where the ancestors came from” ... towards “the mountain where the ancient (mothers and) fathers were in direct communication with heaven” ... toward “paradise itself, with its sacred tree of life.”

Amen.