

**Pilgrimage**  
Rev. Tony Lorenzen  
Pathways Church  
Southlake, TX  
Sunday, August 22, 2010

I wasn't going to preach on this topic today. When I planned this sermon series for our monthly theme on Prayer, I had originally planned to speak about something else on this Sunday, but a funny thing happened on the way to the sanctuary. While I was in the middle of my travels to Boston for the Coming of Age trip and to visit family and friends, and to General Assembly in Minnesota, and to California to attend a friend's wedding, and to Oklahoma for SWUUSI, I realized that my summer travels were not just trips, I was not simply going places for work and vacation time, I was making pilgrimages. And pilgrimages are an ancient form of prayer and spiritual practice.

A Pilgrimage is a journey made to a place with the purpose of venerating or pay homage to the place or a

person or an object or for the purpose of seeking religious aid or divine guidance or to discharge a religious obligation. This was true of all the places I went this summer.

The most obvious pilgrimage was the Coming of Age trip to Boston. This is a traditional pilgrimage for middle school Unitarian Universalists and their adult companions. They come from all over North America to visit our holy shrines. Like medieval Christians visiting the resting places of the saints and seeking to view the relics of the one true cross, they come to 25 Beacon Street, the UUA Headquarters and see portraits of Hosea Ballou, the 18<sup>th</sup> century prophet of Universalism and William Ellery Channing, the 19<sup>th</sup> century formulator of American Unitarianism. They attend worship at King's Chapel, the first Unitarian Church in America and visit shrines of Transcendentalism at Walden Pond seeing Henry David Thoreau's woods and Emerson's home in town in Concord.

They visit the catacomb under the First United Parish Church in Quincy and touch the crypts of John and John Quincy Adams our first and sixth presidents (and their wives), two of our five Unitarians to be chief executive. The pilgrimage to Boston has become almost mythic. It is our UU Mecca. Like any other religion, we have our saints and relics and our holy sites and they get regular visitors from both inside and outside our faith tradition.

I went from Boston to General Assembly. GA is a yearly pilgrimage. One doesn't make the trip so much for the relics and the history as for the people. If Muslims make the Hajj to Mecca as way to demonstrate unity and solidarity with other Muslims and touch the Ka'bah, the stone that dates back to Abraham, UU's go to Boston to touch our holy sites and to GA to be with other UU's.

The Boston pilgrimage and GA were so easy to name as such, I almost missed it. I really noticed I was on pilgrimage in Berkeley, CA at the wedding of a friend from Divinity School. I knew attending this wedding would be a bit outside my budget this summer, but Lisa was an old and dear friend. She is associate professor of moral theology at the Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University. She holds a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Cornell and a Doctorate in Theology from Harvard. Her finance, now husband, holds a Doctorate in World Religions and teaches at the Chaplaincy Institute for Arts and Interfaith Ministry in Berkeley. It was time to go celebrate with them. I was being called. A lot of friends from Harvard Divinity School would be there. All of us were Catholic at the time, Some of us are at very different places now than we were then. Pilgrimage indeed. I had many wonderful conversations, vocational and theological conversations about where our pilgrimages had taken us. I also spent time alone. It was like being on retreat

and having time to reflect and share with a group and having time to pray and meditate alone. My time alone took me to Redwood Trees and Murals in the Mission District. The trees were gentle but stern abbots. Every time I felt like I should be getting back to my hotel and the wedding activities I heard them say, "What's your rush? We've been standing here almost 2,000 years. What's so important you need to be there so quickly." The murals spoke to me of justice and the power of art and the maddening spiral of power and color and money privilege.

Then I went to a very special Church. St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church runs a food pantry. In their sanctuary. Everyone is welcome. No questions are asked. No intake forms are filled out. No one is a client. There is no hierarchy. This was started by author Sara Miles. Sara wrote for national magazines and National Public Radio. She was an atheist. She wanted to go back to church for some

reason. She happened into St. Gregory's. They were having communion. She had a conversion experience. She wondered about the connection between the bread and feeding people. She started a food pantry. It was a lot more complicated than that. It always is. She wrote about it. The book is called *Take This Bread*. Having read the book about her pilgrimage, I had to make this church and the site of the food pantry a stop on my pilgrimage. Of course I missed the pantry by a couple of hours, having gotten lost and missed busses, but I sat in the sanctuary. I had come all that way.

Then I went to SWUUSI. I didn't know what to expect. I went last year. It was OK. This year, it was what I hoped it would be. It was what I hoped church will be. People were excited about Unitarian Universalism. People were singing and praying and wanting to get other people excited about Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalism changed my life. On my pilgrimage from Catholicism, Unitarian

Universalism gave me a spiritual home where I could be religious and not only talk the talk, but walk the walk. And at SWUUSI I saw a Unitarian Universalism that was OK with being religious and spiritual and it was the Unitarian Universalism that wanted to shout its barbaric yawp from the rooftops of the world, not hide away from scary people unlike us in hard to find churches. I had left New England because for all our liberal theology and open mindedness, our churches can still be old fashioned and stuffy and a real turn off to people seeking spirituality and to young people and then at SWUUSI, bless my pilgrim heart, there it was. That's what I came here for, no arguing about it, just doing it. Good old liberal church.

I know you've gone on pilgrimage. You've been to see holy places, people and things. You felt it a duty to yourself to get there, to see something, to perform a holy ritual or discharge an obligation or keep a promise, perhaps spiritual

or religious, perhaps known only to yourself. Maybe you didn't know why you were doing it, maybe you had a singularity of purpose. We all share in one big pilgrimage, like characters on the ride to Canterbury. Life. And along the way we will visit many holy sites.

Our lives are a pilgrimage. It's not about the destination, it's about the journey. It's in the journey. It's cliché, but powerful and true and thus our lives have become a pilgrimage with many resting points, but no destination.

And this pilgrimage is itself a prayer, a calling out to the divine nature of the universe. Yes, there is something you were meant to see and meant to do and a holy obligation you were meant to discharge. And it just may be only you know what it is. You may not have found it yet. You may not have had enough holy conversations. You may not have spent enough time in enough quiet to let your soul speak so that you could hear it clearly. You may have had too much

clutter in your field of vision, but you have made it to this way station. This sanctuary. This refuge. This place from which to continue the journey, map the trail.

I know there's a road you're on. Because you're here, because I'm here, the place we end up paying our homage to the holy or the divine that we've found is here, at Pathways. We gather to seek guidance, and in the Common Ground we've found in this Living Tradition of Unitarian Universalism, we discharge the religious obligation of keeping covenant with one another and building a spiritual community that changes lives. Whoever you are, wherever you've been, whatever you've done, whoever you love, whatever you believe or don't believe, whatever road you've traveled and journey you've been on, you are welcome here. You've found us.

Now go and tell others on their pilgrimages, still searching for a resting place on the journey about what

you've found here. It's okay to talk about church with your friends and neighbors, no one will think this strange in the Bible Belt. If you don't know what to say about Unitarian Universalism or Pathways or if you think you won't remember the UU principles and purposes or our mission or DNA, all you have to tell your fellow pilgrim on the road is this: I go to this church called Pathways. It changed my life. I think you'll like it. Your journey sounds like mine. You should come with me. There's always room for one more pilgrim at the Inn. Come and Journey with me.