Gabriola Ecumenical Society
Pilgrimage Retreats
for Times Such as These

1. Beginning (May) 2. Walking (June) ***3. Coming Home (July)***

Introduction

What is a Pilgrimage? A pilgrimage is an intentional journey into an experience of unknowing and discomfort for the sake of stripping away preconceived expectations. The Latin root of the word pilgrimage, *peregrini*, means "strange" or "stranger." The journey to become a pilgrim means becoming a stranger in the service of transformation.[1]

What to Expect: This pilgrimage was created as a self-guided, individual retreat. Some have chosen to retreat with another person – you are welcome to adapt it in this way. The content comes from a variety of sources that are intended to be broadly resonant. Retreatants are invited to set aside time to work through the retreat on their own and then meet in person with Rev. Karen Hollis and other retreatants ***Tuesday, July 27 at 7pm*** to share our experiences and reflections.

[1] Valters Paintner, Christine. *The Soul of a Pilgrim* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2015) 1-2.

There are several references to God or the Divine throughout this retreat. Please read into these references the 'God of your own understanding.'

Prepare Space/Time

- *Carve out Time: decide on a 2-3 hour block of time, write it into your schedule and honor this commitment you have made to yourself.*
- *Prepare the Space: create a sacred space to begin your pilgrimage. What do you need for your journey? Bring this booklet as your guide and camera (needed for one of the exercises) . . . What else is essential? A candle, journal, or other objects that are meaningful? Make sure there is room in this space for you to sit in stillness and write any reflections which arise.*
- *Turn off your phone and your computer and bring to the space the retreat materials and necessities.*

Suggested Schedule *(Approx. 3 hours) - adjust the times for your own needs (include all the pieces)*

Opening Blessing (15)

Coming Home (60)

- *Home is*
- *Greet Your House*
- *The Eternal Home*
- *Come Home to Yourself*
- *Once I Returned*
- *My Final Question*

Midrash Explorations (60)

Homecoming Walk (30)

Reflection & Journaling (30)

Oikos *or the English version "Eco," means* ***home,***
either a human home, a temple, or the home of the gods, and even the astrological "house" or domicile of a planet. A sacred word covering several profound areas of life, oiko embraces our emotional search for a home, the building and caretaking of churches and temples, and the astrological quest for the most fruitful arrangements of time and place. At the deepest level, ecology involves the spiritual practice of making a human home and, more
mysteriously, finding a home for the soul.[2]

Opening Blessing

Sit with your eyes closed and feet on the floor. Take a few deep breaths and bring yourself into the present moment. Open yourself to the presence of the Holy inside of you and sit for several minutes. Offer authentic gratitude for this day and this time of retreat, and name your intention for this time of retreat. When you are ready, you're invited to pray these words.

O how I love you,
God, your presence is my home, my high abode.
I will be with you, my longing draws me there
where flesh and bone, and heart and soul flame up
in joy that's yours, O Living One.
Sparrows have their nests
and swallows build right next to you.
Your temple altar is their safest keep where they
may lay their eggs and hatch their young.
Anyone who lives near you
is filled with higher purpose and fuller joy.
What else is there to do but go on praising you?
Yes, joy fills all who gain their strength from you,
who walk upon the pilgrim's path
with hearts secure in yours.
O God, you are for us the shining sun,
the shielding shade, and both become the fullness
of your grace and glory.
And as we seek you on this pathway,
we are found by good,
And nothing lasting is withheld from all who walk with
deep integrity of life,
for they shall come to trust
and find in you eternal rest.
And there, O God,
all life is drenched with happiness and joy.
~ Psalm 84:1-4, 10-12 *(Lynn C. Bauman)*

Coming Home

Home is the slumping drop of luggage on floors that bear the ghostly footprints of your motion. The light is a lambent thing that feels right on your shoulders, so that walking here after time away is a convergence of energies. Past, present and future allow you floating passage on the way to a collection of "now"s that beat in your chest, settle on you lightly, glitter in your eyes and lodge in your mind as reflection, introspection and awareness. The shadow of the one you were before you left occupies a space in the corner as you re-enter and engage fully in simple, effortless things you do every day with what you come to recognize as love.[3] **~ Richard Wagamese**, *Embers*

Greet your house every time you come home. This is the first homework assignment I give my clients at my private lessons. Just as you would greet your family or your pet, say, "Hello! I'm home," to your house when you return. If you forget when you walk in the door, then later, when you remember, say, "Thank you for giving me shelter." If you feel shy or embarrassed to say these things out loud, it is fine to say them silently in your mind. If you do this repeatedly, you will start to feel your house respond when you come home. You

[2] Moore, Thomas. *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997) 41-42.

[3] Wagamese, Richard. *Embers* (British Columbia: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013) 72.

will sense its pleasure passing through like a gentle breeze.[4] ~ **Marie Kondo**, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*

The Eternal Home To appreciate the enchantment that home can bring into a life, we have to shift attention from the literal house to the felt experience of home and realize that the sometimes bitter tenacious longing for home many feel may not be satisfied by an expensive house or a mere shelter. Memories, fantasies, and desires for home are subtle and set deep in the heart. The longing for home may ask us for the kind of attention that is much less literal than housing, or that can be satisfied only by aesthetic, emotional, and memorial aspects of a house, and not its convenience and good functioning.

Home is an emotional state, a place in the imagination where feelings of security, belonging, placement, family protection, memory, and personal history abide. Our dreams and fantasies of home may give us direction and calm our anxieties as we continually look for ways to satisfy our longings for home.[5] ~ **Thomas Moore**, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*

To Come Home to Yourself
May all that is unforgiven in you
Be released.

May your fears yield
Their deepest tranquillities.

May all that is unlived in you
Blossom into a future
Graced with love.[6]
~ **John O'Donohue**, *To Bless the Space Between Us*

Once I returned back home to the rhythm of ordinary life, I kept struggling to remember those moments of beauty, to feel their gravity in my bones. So much conspires to make me forget, so many thoughts want me to hold back. This is being a pilgrim: to stay committed to awakening each moment to the truth of life's generosity. I'm to give myself over to the immense love breathing through me. I'm to allow it to spill over into everything I do and with everyone I meet. Every threshold in life is an invitation to this kind of rededication. As we cross over into something new, we pause, we commit ourselves anew.[7] ~ **Christine Valters Paintner**, *The Soul of a Pilgrim*

My final question, "How will I know when I have reached the destination?" brings me full circle, and I face the Mystery again. Perhaps the truth is that we never arrive, not because the journey is too long and too difficult but because we have been there all along. I am coming to believe that there is no final destination except to continue to be on the journey and to know that every place along the way is a holy place because God is present. I believe that God is calling us to stand on our own ground and know that it is holy and let our roots grow deep. And yet at the same time, the journey goes on. It is a paradox, I know, but perhaps we are traveling most faithfully when we know ourselves to be most at home. ~ **Judith E Smith**, "This Ground Is Holy Ground," *Weavings Journal*

questions for reflection

To what are you coming home (physically, emotionally, spiritually)?
What is required of you as you "come home" or re-enter your home (house, body, emotional home, etc)?
What do you long for?

[4] Kondo, Marie. The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2014) 190.
[5] Moore, Thomas. *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997).
[6] O'Donohue, John. *To Bless the Space Between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008) 97.
[7] Valters Paintner, Christine. *The Soul of a Pilgrim* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2015) 131.

Midrash Explorations

Midrash is an ancient practice of the Jewish tradition. Pieces of Midrash are essentially stories *about* the stories of scripture. Rabbis wrote Midrash to help explain problems they encountered in the biblical texts such as inconsistencies or missing voices. Midrash fills out the stories into a more complete picture. These stories form an important part of the Jewish sacred literature. While the Jewish tradition of Midrash originated with the early Rabbis, in more recent years, the feminist movement has brought this practice alive again. Women started to search for the voices of women in the biblical narratives. And we are invited in this retreat to write some Midrash of our own . . . here's how to do it.

- Begin by centering yourself with some deep breaths, move your attention inward, begin settling into stillness.
- Read the text through slowly. Imagine that you are experiencing the story right now; it's not some distant mythical account but a story meant to become alive for you.
- Enter the story with all of your senses engaged. What do you see, taste, smell, hear, and feel? Allow some time for each of these to reveal themselves.
- Let yourself enter into each of the characters in the story. Enter into their experience and their dialogue. What are their hopes and fears? What are their motivations? What wisdom do they have for you?
- Pay attention to the moment in the story which stirs the most curiosity or energy for you – it might be a place of resistance or a place in the story that feels difficult for you. Stay with that energy. Where do the questions emerge? What are the questions that arise for you from the text?
- Use your imagination to answer one or more of those questions. You aren't breaking any sacred rules by adding to the story or filling in gaps – as explained above, this is an ancient practice. The form of the writing (poetry, prose, etc) is up to you – simply let yourself enter the story and see what gifts are there for you to discover.[8]
- You're invited in this pilgrimage to write a piece of Midrash using the parable below.

Luke 15: 11-32 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to

[8] Valters Paintner, 24-27.

go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."' (New Revised Standard Translation)

Example of Midrash: I am the older daughter. The good one. The one who cleans the baseboards. I take out the trash and tidy the kitchen. I am frugal with my spending and cautious with my habits.

I weave casual celebrations into my life, small and simple pleasures, raw vegan gluten-free sugar-free organic smoothie treats with a generous tip. These celebrations are really an extension of health-care and self-care.

My younger brother, though, makes me livid, livid, livid. He is sloppy, disrespectful, and sometimes cruel. He spends recklessly, extravagantly, and immoderately. He makes jokes about my cousin's early labor, says insensitive things about my uncle's cancer, and never gets his homework in on time.

My brother's friends love him more, my mother loves him more, because of his careless words, because he "tells it like it is." My mother worries that a challenging education could crush his spirit.

Disobedience to who? To myself? If their love is truly unconditional, then I have been imprisoning myself for a lifetime, guarding my own cell door with illusions of worthiness, I clench my jaw at my brother's party. The frustration and anger cannot show. I push it down, for I cannot feel these emotions. I am the older daughter. [9]
- Melody

[9] Valters Paintner. 105-6.

Homecoming Walk

Go for a walk – the form of the walk is up to you – take pictures, bathe in the forest, make a mandala, or simply get outdoors.

If you can, start your walk from your front door (instead of driving somewhere). At the end of your walk, return and greet your home as you enter it; give thanks for your home, and tell your home of your summer of pilgrimage (maybe write it in your journal). Tell your home how you are the same and how you are different. Tell your home about any daily patterns you need to shift and the support you need to sustain these changes, or ways in which your inner journey need to be expressed outwardly (maybe discuss this with those you live with, too!). And share with it your questions.

Perhaps you want to make the evening meal after your walk a ritual of blessing. Perhaps you bring out the nice dishes, set some flowers on the table and give thanks as you sit down to eat. Give thanks for your home and the life you live in it.

Reflection & Journaling:

What has this pilgrimage revealed about
the purpose of your life right now?

How have the questions you're asking of your life
changed as a result of this pilgrimage?

How will you joyfully rededicate yourself to your own life?

What does it look like for you to
live into the idea that "life is a pilgrimage?"

A Blessing Called Sanctuary[10]

You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter
entirely—
nothing of you
found foreign or strange,
nothing of your life
that you were asked
to leave behind
or to carry in silence
or in shame.

Tentative steps
became settling in,
leaning into the blessing
that enfolded you,
taking your place in the circle
that stunned you
with its unimagined grace.

You began to breathe again,
to move without fear,
to speak with abandon
the words you carried
in your bones,
that echoed in your being.

You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing
is that it will not leave you alone,
will not let you linger
in safety,
in stasis.

The time will come
when this blessing
will ask you to leave,
not because it has tired of you
but because it desires for you
to become the sanctuary
that you have found—
to speak your word
into the world,
to tell what you have heard
with your own ears,
seen with your own eyes,
known in your own heart:

that you are beloved,
precious child of God,
beautiful to behold,
and you are welcome
and more than welcome
here.

~ Jan Richardson, *Circle of Grace*

[10] Richardson, Jan. Circle of Grace (Florida: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015) 55.