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Philippians 3:1-16
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Just Keep Moving

As you know, this summer I checked off one of my life bucket list items by walking 160 miles on the Camino de Santiago, in Spain. For over 1200 years, pilgrims have walked various routes ending at St James Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela where the bones of St James or Jesus' brother are purported to be buried. The Camino means many things to various people. Some do it for spiritual reasons. Some do it to mark a transition or milestone in life like graduation, starting a new career, getting married, empty nesting, retirement, or following the death of a spouse. For me, I was there to reflect on what do I want this next season of my ministerial life at Cascades to look like.

One of the things that you hear often on the Camino is the phrase, "The Camino provides." Whatever you need or whatever you are searching for, the Camino provides it.

For me, the Camino and God provided a sense of clarity and continued calling to my work here at Cascades. It was such a blessing to have the time away. Thank you very much!

Pilgrimage and life journeys are common themes throughout scripture. In fact the Scripture I selected for today talks about how no journey is perfect. There are ups and downs. Good days and not so good days. Some days you feel really invigorating. Some days you just want to give up. The important thing on any pilgrimage is that you keep moving!

Please join me as I read from Philippians 3:1-16.

Further, my brothers and sisters, be joyful because you belong to the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write about some important matters to you again. If you know about them, you will have a safe path to follow. **2** Watch out for those dogs. They are people who do evil things. When they circumcise, it is nothing more than a useless cutting of the body. **3** But we have been truly circumcised. We serve God by the power of his Spirit. We boast about what Christ Jesus has done. We don't put our trust in who we are or what we can do. **4** I have many reasons to trust in who I am and what I have done. Someone else may think they have reasons to trust in these things. But I have even more.

5 I was circumcised on the eighth day. I am part of the people of Israel. I am from the tribe of Benjamin. I am a pure Hebrew. As far as the law is concerned, I

am a Pharisee. **6** As far as being committed is concerned, I opposed and attacked the church. As far as keeping the law is concerned, I kept it perfectly.

7 I thought things like that were really something great. But now I consider them to be nothing because of Christ. **8** Even more, I consider everything to be nothing compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. To know him is worth much more than anything else. Because of him I have lost everything. But I consider all of it to be garbage so I can know Christ better. **9** I want to be joined to him. Being right with God does not come from my obeying the law. It comes because I believe in Christ. It comes from God because of faith. **10** I want to know Christ better. Yes, I want to know the power that raised him from the dead. I want to join him in his sufferings. I want to become like him by sharing in his death. **11** Then by God's grace I will rise from the dead.

12 I have not yet received all these things. I have not yet reached my goal. Christ Jesus took hold of me so that I could reach that goal. So I keep pushing myself forward to reach it. **13** Brothers and sisters, I don't consider that I have taken hold of it yet. But here is the one thing I do. I forget what is behind me. I push hard toward what is ahead of me. **14** I push myself forward toward the goal to win the prize. God has appointed me to win it. The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus himself.

15 So all of us who are grown up in the faith should see things this way. Maybe you think differently about something. But God will make it clear to you. **16** Only let us live up to what we have already reached.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning I want to share more about my time and some of the lessons I learned on the Camino using the words of the Apostle Paul as a rubric.

Paul say's "Rejoice in the Lord always. I say again rejoice." This seems to be a theme running throughout his letter to the church in Philippi. They were stuck in the midst of a brutal church conflict that was causing some division amongst its members. And sometimes when we are slugging it out in ministry, we need to be reminded that of the importance of being joyful.

This is a picture of our group of fifteen pastors and two leaders on the first night together. We are on the beach in San Sebastian in the heart of the Basque country. We had communion and a blessing before we started out on our first trek the next day. As you can see, it was a beautiful evening. But don't let that fool you, because things were about to change the very next morning when the rains came in.

We woke up to a fog so thick that was like rain. And then throughout the morning, it began to rain and rain and rain. Cold rain. We walked uphill for long stretches, through mountain trails and pastures, for what seemed like forever. This

a picture of my friend Greg, a pastor for New York State as we were slugging through the mud and the rain. Fortunately we had ponchos to keep our torsos dry and warm, though our shoes were caked with mud.

Finally at the top of the bluff, we reach a little coffee shop where people welcomed us in, gave us something to eat and some warm coffee to warm us up. Not only did it feed our bodies, but it warmed up our souls.

Paul's words encourage us to not put our trust in who we are or what we can do. Or in the weather for that matter. But to put our trust in Jesus Christ alone, who is our shelter from the storm.

He also tells us to watch out for those religious people who tell you that you must do or be something in particular in order to be included in God's covenant of grace. These are people who do incredible harm to fellow pilgrims by weighting them down with unnecessary things that they feel need to be done in order to prepared for the journey.

In deed as we were walking not only did we need to watch the weather, but we had to watch out for dogs we encountered along the way and thieves who could have pick pocketed us.

Another thing that Paul tells us is that no one is perfect on the journey. We are all just pilgrims on the same journey, at different stages of our pilgrimage. Indeed I proved that to be true as I taught my fellow pilgrims how to play cribbage. Most it was their first time. And either I am a terrible cribbage player or a darn good teacher, but it seemed that I couldn't win a game to save my life. So I guess the point is, that there is always room for improvement even in those areas that we think we have it down pat.

One of the things, one hears often on the Camino is that it is about the journey not the destination. That is because we never truly arrive at our final destination, we are always arriving. Even as we arrived in Santiago de Compostela, while it was the end of our journey together, it was the start of our individual journeys back home.

Here are some pictures of us arriving into Santiago de Compostela and finally into St. James Square. As pilgrims arrive, you hear shouts and cheers. There was even a bagpiper who serenaded us as we came into the city. Being that we travel at different paces and in different groups, we knew that we wouldn't all arrive at the same time. We had planned to rendezvous later.

That was a mistake. One of our friends was having some foot trouble and got left behind. We had seen her back at a coffee shop earlier in the day on the trail and seemed to be doing fine. As you approach Santiago which is a fairly modern and big city after traveling through tiny little hamlets and towns, it was confusing. They didn't have as many Camino markers which had guided us along the way. And she got lost, was scared, and all alone.

When our dear friend eventually made it into the city and met up with the rest of us for lunch, she was not happy. We had let her down. And she let us know about it.

Sometimes in life, we can get careless and not think about the others who are traveling along with us. Sometimes our transgression are intentional. Sometimes they are not. Still we needed to ask for forgiveness and do what we could to make amends. Afterwards, we all agreed that we should have been more intentional to ensure that we all arrived to Santiago together and not on our own.

Another thing that the Camino taught us is that sometimes life is a grind and you just need to push through the pain. Now I had done some serious training before I left. So I was used to walking 10 to 12 miles at a time. Because of this, I was able to get my feet dialed in to find out what shoes I need, what kind of socks didn't give me blisters, what pace was best, and how frequently I needed to take breaks.

But even still, walking 15 miles, day in and day out, got wearisome. Sometimes you felt like a walking zombie, especially early in the morning before you had your first cafe con leche.

And so it was extremely important to pay attention to the pain because our bodies were trying to tell us something. Sometimes as we were walking you'd start to feel hotspots in your shoes or places where blisters were starting to form. It was crucial to stop right then and there in order to attend to those hot spots before they created worse and more debilitating blisters.

The Apostle Paul was no stranger to pain. He suffered tremendously during his journey with Christ. In comparing his suffering to those of others, he told the Corinthians, "I have worked harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I have been beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day at open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concerns for all the churches."¹

All I did, my friends, was walk 160 miles. And as hard as that may sound, we didn't suffer!

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

Still Paul didn't let that suffering stop him. He saw a prize ahead of him that pushed him beyond the pain toward some future glory. A prize that would come when he finally crossed the finish line of life.

Another thing we learned on the Camino was the importance of going at your own pace. The Camino was not a race, nor a competition to see who can get to the end the fastest. It was one that required us to slow down, sometimes uncomfortably so, below a three mile per hour pace, the same pace that Jesus walked with his disciples, so that we would meet other pilgrims, have unhurried conversations with friends, see the beauty in small things, enjoy a little cafe con leche, and smell the roses along the way.

The last take away that I will share with you today was the importance of moving. Isn't that true in life in general? I heard it said recently that movement is life. Once we stop moving, we die. Plain and simple. Which is why we need to keep this body that we've been given in the best of shape as possible. Keep walking. Keep working out. Keep on keeping on. Just keep moving!

Because one day, we will each cross the finish line of life and hopefully hear the voice of our Lord and Savior saying, "Well done good and faithful servant. Come and enter into my rest." At the end of our journey on the Camino de Santiago, as we came into the square at St James Cathedral, we could hear groups of pilgrims cheering each other on as they finished their trek. Some did the full 500 miles. Some like us did 160 miles. Some did the final 80 miles in order to get their pilgrim certificate saying they did the Camino de Santiago. The length of the journey didn't matter but the fact that we were doing it.

So may we each just keep moving on in our own pilgrimages in life. May we have joy in the journey along the way. And may we press on through thick and thin, the good, the bad, and the ugly, to win the prize for which God has called us each heavenward in Christ Jesus. Amen.