

Are you different when you are travelling than when you are in your at home self? Have you ever noticed that? There is something about breaking with the daily routines, heading out on the road or on a path that has the power to bring other parts of ourselves out, make us more open to the world, and those we meet, and maybe even to ourselves, and I dare say to God as we head out on the road.

I am sure that is partly what was going on for the un-named disciples of Jesus who were on the road to Emmaus that day after the devastating events of the Passover weekend.

You place yourself on the road to somewhere partly so that you can be open in a different way. That is why the word we use for travel when it has an intentional spiritual component is a pilgrimage. With a pilgrimage you leave intending to be open to an encounter that could change you. Sometimes you go with a very specific intention, a prayer, a longing. Sometimes it is not as specific as that. Those disciples who set out to return home that day likely had no idea who they would meet on the road, but they were open to an encounter and they had one. It happened on the road. And it led them to invite him to stay with them, and it really happened when he broke the bread and they realized that it was him all along.

The group that went to Guatemala this summer was on a pilgrimage with the stated intention to be open to the possibility of an encounter or a series of them, and the possibility that that might change the way they see the world and life and what it is all about. I want you to hear directly from two of those travelers, Alistair and Margaret, tell you in their own words what the trip meant to them.

The witness of the Spirit from two pilgrims of the Guatemala Discovery trip.

People ask me, why do you take people to Guatemala? Why do you go? And why there? Wouldn't it be better to focus closer to home? These are good questions. And there is a certain randomness to it, the result of the coincidence that Highlands has had relationships there for decades and I have had a connection there since the late 80s and early 90s and closer relationships there since 2011. But that feels kind of circumstantial.

It really has more to do with what I have witnessed happen time and again for people, including myself. We set out on the road.

- We do it in community- together. Which is risky. It means right off the bat that it is not just about us and how we need it to be. And we will see the world through others eyes as well as our own.
- We are open to the presence of God. Travelling with our faith community means that we are open in some way to the possibility that we might have a spiritual encounter.
- The network of people and relationships we have in Guatemala and the culture of tenderness that exists there is so very different than our fast moving competitive culture here means we slow down and pay attention differently.
- And of course learning, the opportunity to offer something back, the joy and heart ache of encounters with people who live so very differently that we do but who are human just like we are.

It has such potential to break us open, to open our eyes, and to have us returning home proclaiming the goodness of life, the blessedness of our lives in particular, and the presence of God in the midst of it all.

That is always a possibility, in any day. That is true. You don't need to go away for that to be true. Every day is new and untouched and God is always ready

to encounter us on the road. Our daily spiritual practices are intended to help us travel every day in this way. But sometimes, if we are blessed with the opportunity, we take a different path. We step off our regular life. we have an encounter on the road, some brush with the holy, and our eyes are opened, our hearts burn within us, and we know the ground upon which we walk is somehow holy.

Thanks be to God for these moments. May we always be open to them.

In his blessing for the traveler, John O'Donohue says:

*Every time you leave home, another road takes you into a world you were never in.*

*New strangers on other paths await.*

*New places that have never seen you will startle a little at your entry.*

*Old places that know you well will pretend nothing changed since your last visit.*

*When you travel, you find yourself alone in a different way,*

*more attentive now to the self you bring along, Your more subtle eye watching you abroad;*

*and how what meets you touches that part of the heart that lies low at home:*

*how you unexpectedly attune to the timbre in some voice, opening in conversation you want to take in*

*to where your longing has pressed hard enough inward, on some unsaid dark, to create a crystal of insight you could not have known you needed to illuminate your way.*

*When you travel, a new silence goes with you, and if you listen, you will hear what your heart would love to say.*

*A journey can become a sacred thing:*

*make sure, before you go, to take the time to bless your going forth, to free your heart of ballast so that the compass of your soul might direct you toward the territories of spirit where you will discover more of your hidden life, and the urgencies that deserve to claim you.*

*May you travel in an awakened way, gathered wisely into your inner ground; that you may not waste the invitations which wait along the way to transform you.*

*May you travel safely, arrive refreshed, and live your time away to its fullest; return home more enriched, and free to balance the gift of days which call you.*