

The pilgrimage of faith

Julian Smith *reflects on* Philippians 3:4b-14

Some old maps show Europe criss-crossed by hundreds of tracks heading westwards. They converge at mountain passes and become fewer as they near their destination, the city of Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain. These are pilgrim routes, the Caminos de Santiago, and some of them are a thousand years old.

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is different from other pilgrimages, for pilgrims speak more about walking the Camino than about arriving. While the word *camino* means "road", it also means "way", and walking the Way of St James is about new ways of being and of seeing things.

The idea that faith is a pilgrimage lies behind Paul's words to the Philippians. He writes about loss and gain, about the discovery of a new faith that transcends the old, about new ways of being and seeing things. Paul sees faith as a journey, a pilgrimage, and not a destination. His life has been turned on its head, but that is only part of his journey and he is called to press on until the journey's end. Being open to change, to new ways of being and seeing things, has enabled Paul to change.

Just as Spain reveals new facets of itself to the pilgrim walking the Camino de Santiago, so God reveals new glimpses of love and fresh experiences of grace to those who are open. 🌱



Lord Jesus, on our journey of faith open our eyes to the richness of God's grace revealed in our fellow pilgrims. Help us, with Paul, to press on to our journey's end in wonder, thankfulness and praise. Amen.

Being a poet-in-residence

Joined-up writing

by Julia McGuinness

As Chester Cathedral's poet-in-residence I'm running a writing workshop in the library – a large room with tall windows, musty book-lined shelves and sober portraits of bishops on its walls. Between glass cases containing the Charles Kingsley collection (the writer was once canon here), ten of us sit round a modern Polomint-shaped table. They are eager

to write in this building. Someone describes the cathedral as "a contained vastness"; another speaks of the sense of being in the present moment but standing under "the weight of time". So we write about being here. Later we explore the cathedral, looking for words and images that commemorate those who are remembered. We use our imagination to bring some of these characters to life in our own words, wondering what it would be like if they could meet – bishops, soldiers, local dignitaries, eighteenth-century wives.

Though it's often a solitary activity, writing today has connected us to one another in this place, as well as to those who were here before us. 🌱

“The world thirsts for grace. When grace descends, the world falls silent before it.”

Philip Yancey (born 1949), author

Faith and mental health

by Katharine Smith

October 10 is Mental Health Day. Over the next three weeks Katharine Smith considers how mental health and illness can affect a person's relationships and their faith.

Sarah was diagnosed with depression and anxiety following the death of her father. "I felt suffocated by this thick dark cloud cutting me off from other people. At one point I actually stopped going to church altogether." Feelings of self-hatred often accompany depression and it takes perseverance to support someone through the experience.

Sarah's congregation sent cards, left brief phone messages offered practical help and gentle invitations to meet. "Eventually," says Sarah, "the message got through, that people did love me and that I was worth something to them and to God." As she recovered she became able to accept love and support. Her message to anyone wanting to support someone in mental distress is: "Persevere with prayer... keep assuring them of your love and God's love. It could make all the difference." 🌱

Katharine is a licensed reader in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. She has written about her own experience of suffering from depression (Angels in the Wilderness, Redemptorist Publications) and faith and recovery (Recovering from Depression, SPCK).