



July 17, 2024

A Note from Pastor Jon

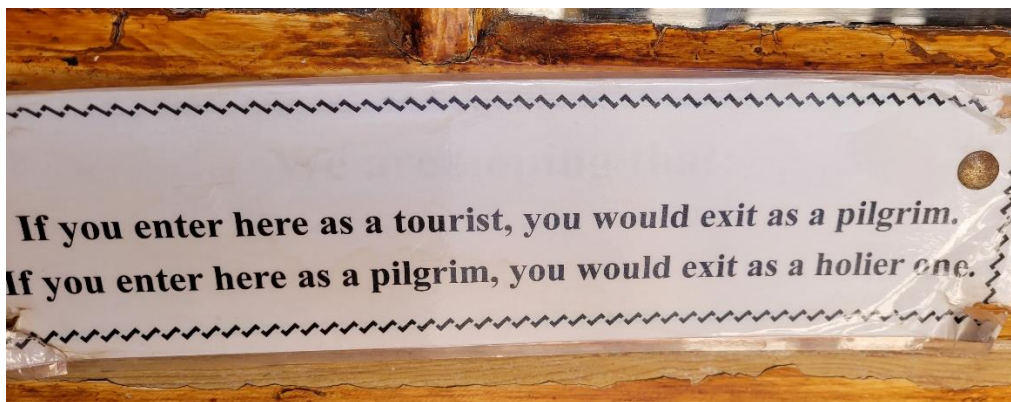
Greatest Hists: Revisiting some previous Letters of Encouragement, in celebration of all God has done during these last four years!

Dear Friends,

It's been just over 2 years since I returned from my pilgrimage to the Holy Land. My heart aches for the land in conflict and war and for the people and victims of war. The current climate in Israel/Palestine still does not in any way diminish my memory or experiences on the pilgrimage, but I have thought of the people and that Holy Land and pray that one day peace may come...

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Originally sent July 27, 2022:



We are deep into our **50 Days of Embodiment** here at HUMC in this season of Pentecost (2024 update: You can still find those embodiment practices on our website, here: <https://hilliardumc.org/pages/50-days-of-embodiment/>).

This has been a time when we have been encouraged to live into our faith as Christians in a full body experience. Speak the prayers, meditate, walk, even lay ourselves prostrate, falling flat on our face before God as an act of humility and reverence.

I hope and pray you have been embodying your faith and have felt the presence of our holy God in your life.

It's been almost three weeks now since I returned from my own embodied practice of pilgrimage to the land we call holy.

I could not help but understand the Holy Land as anything but an embodied place. The sights, the smells, the sounds, the tastes, and the touch — all real and embodied since the dawn of creation.

After all, ancient Jewish tradition says that on the day God created the heavens and the earth, God reached down and touched the peak known as Mt. Moriah, and from there all the earth in its embodied self was formed.

Each day of my pilgrimage I felt as if I needed to pinch myself to ensure I was not dreaming, but I was actually in this holy place attempting to seek out those thin places where heaven and earth meet.

At the end of our first day, I was sitting with the others at the top of the Mount of Olives. We were overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem. The ancient grounds of the Temple Mound appeared to be just a stone's throw away.

As we sat and the cool breeze moved across, one of our trip leaders, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, asked us what we were seeking on this pilgrimage.



Temple Mound from the Mount of Olives



Temple Mound

I felt a deep yearning in my soul as I was struggling to articulate exactly what I was seeking. I felt my body tense as I could not seem to find the right words to articulate what I was

thinking and feeling. I listened as my fellow pilgrims named what they were seeking, and I wondered what I was missing.

Then, in that moment, I felt it... in my soul, in my mind, and out of my mouth.

“I come to this pilgrimage not knowing what I do not know and simply with my palms up, asking God to be made fully known to me in new and unique ways in this sacred land. I come to experience and to embody my faith fully in this place.”

I do not think I really understood what I was asking for that Tuesday night, a tired and weary pilgrim who had been traveling for over 24 hours and who was ready for a hot shower and some food.

Yet in my body, in my soul, looking back on that day, I knew. I knew that this pilgrim, this pastor who is at about a halfway point of pastoral ministry, needed a fresh encounter, a fully-embodied experience in the land where the traditions of my faith took root thousands of years ago.

Each day of the pilgrimage I embraced the full embodiment of the experience, in an attempt to give myself as much room as possible for God’s self to be made known fully to me in any way possible in such a unique, special, and holy place.

Not every site we visited spoke to me and my soul, but every site, every step, every moment was holy. **But WOW, when I did find myself entering into one of those thin places with palms up, I felt the presence of God with every fiber of my being.**

One such place came on Wednesday morning June 29. I was standing on the Southern Steps of the Temple Mound, the very same steps that Jesus and his disciples would have walked as they entered the Temple grounds.



Southern Steps



Southern Steps

These offset stones were designed to cause the pilgrim to slow down and be intentional about each step as they entered such a sacred space.

Until that moment, from the time I left Columbus, I had been so caught up in this adventure of a lifetime that I felt myself moving hastily from place to place — as a tourist not a pilgrim.

In that place, however, in that moment, I was reminded that I too was on a sacred pilgrimage, a holy journey. But my holy journey was not limited to that space where the forefathers and foremothers of our faith had once believed God to be “confined.”

I was reminded in every fiber of my being that my God was walking this pilgrimage with me.

From that moment on, I found myself slowing down, being quiet, listening, in a full embodiment experience. By doing so I would find God more often showing up in unexpected places.



One example came as we visited the site known as the Primacy of Peter. This is the location where Jesus appears to the disciples early one morning after his resurrection in John 21.

When we talk about places in the Holy Land that are referenced in the Bible, most places are identified today as being somewhere within a radius of where a biblical event took place, and some places are clearly the actual place.

While it's hard to know if this place was *the actual place* where Jesus cooked the fish for the disciples, I do know that in that place I felt a close connection in my soul that I felt in few other places on my pilgrimage. Something sacred, something holy happened on that shoreline of the Sea of Galilee.

For a brief moment, in an unexpected place, I could sense a deep and reassuring presence of God in my life and in my call to share the love of God with all persons, so they too may know they are loved by God, no matter what.

Since my return home, as I have thought back over my experience and particularly the Southern Steps, I am reminded that every day of this lifelong pilgrimage as a follower of Jesus, I must intentionally pause and slow myself down.

Doing so will allow me to be fully present to engage with God whenever and wherever God is made known in order that I might embody — fully embody — my faith.

It's not about just seeking God in the "holy places" but being prepared to experience God in every place.

Grace and peace on your journey, friends,

Jon



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