

Jottings
November 20, 2020

Pilgrims

A certificate hangs on the wall of my mother's home, an acknowledgement of the lineal descendency of my father from Edward Fuller, one of the 102 passengers on a ship named the Mayflower that, four hundred years ago tomorrow, anchored is what is now known as Provincetown Harbor. Later that day, Edward Fuller signed his name to a document called the Mayflower Compact. Within weeks, both he and his wife would be dead.

Someone gave my great-great-...-great Uncle Ed a different name: Pilgrim. I've never been sure *pilgrim* was ever truly an appropriate name for those who came on that ship. "A person who journeys, especially a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion." Yes, 37 of the passengers were members of a separatist Puritan congregation in Leiden, The Netherlands, with hopes of establishing a colony where they could preserve their English identities but practice their religion without interference from the English government or church. The others? Not so much. And the long-term impact on the native peoples they met and would soon displace seems hardly to reflect the sacred part of that word.

Pilgrim. Here in this Presbytery, there are currently more than 170 pilgrims, myself included, who have embarked on what we have called a Spiritual Anti-Racism Pilgrimage. This yearlong journey invites us into engagement with the racial history of Minnesota and Western Wisconsin; to use personal reflection and small groups to practice spiritual skills for anti-racist living; and to take action in solidarity with Black, Indigenous and other People of Color who are our neighbors in the community. We're walking it together, and it has in fact been deeply sacred these first few months.

Pilgrim. This week, my friend and former colleague Wesley Granberg-Michaelson published *Without Oars: Casting Off into a Life of Pilgrimage*. "What I've learned, and write about, is that a pilgrimage is about what we leave behind in order to move ahead," writes Wes in [a blog about pilgrimage and his book](#). "Above all, it calls us to an ever-deeper level of spiritual relinquishment to embrace the fullness of God's presence and love." The book is a remarkable piece of writing; I've read it, and I highly recommend it. Oh, and it comes with a great [reflection guide](#), too.

I'd never much seen myself as a pilgrim. I'm a pretty in-my-head, by-the-book guy, too much so, perhaps. But more and more, through this time of polarization and COVID-fatigue and the burst-bubble of being in control, I find myself drawn to practices that invite me to go deeper with God. To journey intentionally away from a settled, all-figured-out past toward a future infused with a spiritual presence. To become, to be, a spiritual pilgrim.

In a time when we think all we can do is stay home, pilgrimage beckons—one that can start right where we are, not in reaction or fear, but as intentional, courageous, faithful followers of Jesus.