

Sabbatical Chronicle #2 – July 20, 2022

Buen Camino Immanuel! This sabbatical has continued to be one of the most incredible experiences of my life and I'm filled with gratitude to all of you for these three months of renewal and refreshment. After visiting old and dear friends from Washington state, Sarah and I embarked for Spain at the end of June to "hit the ground walking" for our five-day, seventy-two mile pilgrimage from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain.



A fascinating piece of historical background we learned was the strongly Celtic influence in this portion of Galicia (from the root Gaelic) in northwest Spain. Pre-Christian druids from Ireland settled in this portion of the country and their influence is still felt today.



It was an unforgettable experience to travel by foot for about fifteen miles each day for five days. The shells on our backpacks were signs that we were pilgrims. To verify our pilgrimage, we needed to get two stamps a day on our pilgrim passports. You can get these unique stamps at the cottages we stayed in, churches, or restaurants along the Camino. Transportation by foot is such a different experience compared to planes, trains, and automobiles. My favorite part of the trip was having quality and quantity time walking and talking with Sarah. We loved also walking with our fellow *peregrinos* (pilgrims). Over 350,000 people walk the

Camino de Santiago each year. It was a true joy to finally reach the stunning cathedral pictured above and attend the pilgrim service in the massive sanctuary. We concluded our trip with a bus tour to Finisterre, which means “the end of the earth.” I enjoyed touching the waters of the “Coast of Death” (the moniker comes from the many shipwrecks there) and more importantly, living to tell about the experience! And for a cherry on top, we had a twenty-four hour layover in Dublin, Ireland and were able to enjoy the festivities at the Temple Bar District downtown. Throughout this sabbatical I’ve immersed myself in prayer and reading, particularly books on Orthodox prayer (the Jesus Prayer) and spirituality. It’s been a refreshing experience to enjoy the Divine Liturgy chanted at several Orthodox churches in town. I’ve enjoyed reading more novels: re-reading Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, and Dicken’s *Great Expectations*, as well as Nelson Mandela’s inspiring autobiography *A Long Walk to Freedom* and Father Greg Boyle’s new book, *The Whole Language*, sharing about his ministry with LA gang members through the ministry Homeboys Industries he founded. I’m hoping to take a few pottery classes with the kids before the conclusion of the sabbatical.

Looking back over the last several months, the extended times of prayer, regular exercise, hanging out with family and friends, and travel have been so invigorating to my mind, body, and soul. I look forward to returning to Immanuel on Tuesday, August 2nd to begin a new chapter with all of you! I’m so incredibly thankful to Rev. John Cheek for being such a wonderful person and interim sabbatical pastor and our incredible staff through all the mountain tops and valleys of ministry and life. Thank you again for your prayers and enabling this incredibly refreshing time to be a reality. I’m truly fortunate to be surrounded by such a great community of faith.

See you soon!

John