

This I believe

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I believe in the importance and value of Community.

I believe we desperately need one another other to navigate this chaotic world.

Many of you may know that I have recently returned from hiking the Camino in Spain. For those who are not familiar, the Camino is a 500-mile pilgrimage trail leading from the foothills of the Pyrenees in France to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain. Millions of pilgrims have walked this journey for well over 1000 years, and now I too, am one of them.

From the moment that I first heard about this ancient pilgrimage route, I was intrigued and yearned to experience the physicality of the trail while immersed in the beauty of a different culture. It took me 13 years, but this past September and October my dream finally became a reality.

As I opened by saying that I believe in the importance of community you might be surprised to hear that I chose to walk the Camino alone. I am still processing my journey and learning to put a narrative to all that I experienced, but I hope to share with you a little taste of what I learned while walking alongside my fellow pilgrims from all over the world.

Walking 15 to 20 miles a day gave me plenty of time and space for introspection, but the truth is that I was never really alone. The Camino is an indescribable community unto itself. A beautiful microcosm of possibility of what our world could be if we all slowed down and really took the time to get to know one another. There is something magical about the simple rhythm of walking, paring down your belongings to what is truly essential and sharing a common purpose with your fellow Pilgrim to help you to really connect with humanity.

I feel my words are inept to express the sense of community that there was amongst us pilgrims, but we all knew that we were in this journey together. There were shared songs, bandages, prayers, poetry readings and communal meals, and there was never a doubt that everyone was welcome at the table.

But what struck me most is what I refer to as the holy intimacy amongst strangers. The common trail question of “Why are you walking the Camino?” was a gateway for my fellow travelers to quickly share from the depths of their souls what was happening in their lives.

I can only begin to tell you some of the intimate exchanges that I experienced. – There was James, a 66-year-old man from California who was coming to terms with his alcoholism after the loss of a 43-year marriage. He gave out serenity prayer coins to those he met a long the way. I met Christian, a young man from France who was walking as a form of therapy with a social worker to overcome his anxiety and learn social skills. There was Donna, whose husband had recently died from stomach cancer, only to learn right after his passing that two of her three children also shared the same diagnosis. She was walking in celebration of their simultaneous successful surgeries to remove their stomachs. There was Julia whose husband had declared his need to “liberate their marriage” and she was walking the Camino while he met with his lover.

It was in these moments that I truly recognized and saw that community is what happens when a group of people cross a threshold together and enter a liminal time and space- that is, an in-between time that is neither past nor present. And this, my friends is truly holy ground.

They say that the real Camino journey starts when you reintegrate yourself back into your life at home. I am blessed to have returned to my wonderful family and friends and all of you here at CMCL, where I

believe that we are all working together to embrace the challenge of becoming whole.

In the words of Parker Palmer, we cannot embrace it alone—at least, not for long: we need trustworthy relationships to nourish us, we need tenacious communities of support to sustain us on the journey. We need a rare but real form of community that I call a “circle of trust.”¹

Stepping away from my daily life was an opportunity for me to see how fortunate we are to have created such an intimate and sacred community of trust here at CMCL.

A core belief here at our church is that we are **known and loved by God**. I believe that what we are really experiencing is that we are **known and loved by one another**.

I strive to see the divinity in each and every one of you and believe that you do the same for me. And so I from the depth of my heart I bow to you in gratitude and thank you all for being my community and walking with me as I journey through this life.

1 —Parker J. Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness (adapted)