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Sacred spaces allow God to make life new again

Jocelyn A. Sideco | Aug. 8, 2013 Young Voices

This is part two of Jocelyn A. Sideco's reflections on her travels to the Camino and Europe.Read part one[1].

Saints and sinners alike greeted me as I entered Santiago and made my way to the cathedral. I finished the ancient pilgrimage of more than 370 miles in about 25 days! I looked around to see tears running swiftly down cheeks of those who are not even the slightest religious; huge arms outstretched in thanksgiving and hospitality by some of the quietest people who spent most of their time walking alone; and the chanting, cheering and singing of hundreds of youth groups. Santiago was the place to be. Santiago was like heaven on earth.

It was here that people celebrated life. Exhausted, exhilarated, inspired and proud, we all knew our accomplishment was achieved and shared by many others. We made it. We did it. Wow.

We reflected on moments of difficulty with a lightness. Some people justified just how worth it the entire journey had been. We planned for future reunions, collected Facebook requests and attended Mass together, wanting to bask in the glory of a shared transformational experience.

I snuck in to greet St. James early the next day so I could have private moment to thank him for his example, for his courage, for his inspiration, for his service and for his faith. Traditionally, pilgrims arriving to Santiago would come up to the saint behind the altar and hug him before visiting where he lay. Such a simple gesture, this hug. This was big for me. I do not consider myself a huggy type of a person. Yet this action helped simplify my attitude and my posture in serving God and God's people. I need to open myself up just a little more in order to welcome the Holy Spirit in my life and offer the peace and grace of God in the form of hospitality to others.

This invitation to embody this embrace continued to resonate with me as I journeyed through Cologne, Germany; Canterbury, England; London; Rhyl, Wales; Harrogate, England; Glasgow, Scotland; Oban, Scotland; and the Isle of Mull and Iona Island, where St. Columba first arrived in the year 563, off the western coast of Scotland.

It is in this sacred space I witnessed God's continued efforts to pronounce the good news in sunsets and thin horizons that drizzled red in a clear blue sky; single boats adrift in the quiet sea; centuries-old stone that nourished new plants and flowers; a reconstructed abbey and ruined nunnery; puffins; otters; seals; communal prayers where inclusive language is a way of being; and seekers from all over the world who believe the trek is worth to obtain peace and glimpses of the kin-dom.

Originally, I thought the space of prayer and dedication of generations of innovative Christian community and confident acts of justice were why I was led this progressive abbey. But as the days unfolded, God's abundant grace came to me in the form of living in community with families from all over the world. It was among my peers that God was inviting me to embrace life and to open myself to their experiences and our experiences together. From hikes along the island to group reflection exercises to artistic attempts to uncovering God to quotidian tasks of chopping vegetables, setting tables, cleaning toilets, eating with one another and praying loudly through song, spoken word and action, God was making my life new again.

Now I know this hug is not just between me and God or between me and a statue of a saint or me and just one person. This hug is about opening my arms out wider so the dynamic of relationships takes center stage.

Thank you, God, for opening my eyes, heart and arms to a real and deep experience of the Trinity -- God in relationship, God made whole through our very lives together.

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a retreat leader, spiritual director and innovative minister who specializes in mission-centered ministry. Visit her budding new online ministry, In Good Company, at contemplativecompanions.org [2] or email her at jocelyn@contemplativecompanions.org [3].]

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