



Pilgrim Paths
Chipping Norton Deanery

‘Sensing Creation’

A Prayer Walk

Take this leaflet

Take a stick and a bag

Set your heart on prayer



'God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees and flowers and clouds and stars', (Martin Luther).



The first book of the Bible, Genesis, contains the well known story of creation.

However, evidence that God's love extends throughout his creation is found in the entire Bible, rejoicing in the capacity of nature to reveal not only God's love for the world and those who inhabit it, but his



power, his wisdom, his might, his endless creativity and imagination, and his tender care for every detail.

Jesus constantly uses examples taken from nature to illustrate aspects of God's kingdom, and of our own behaviour within it. We are taught to appreciate the vast expanses of fields and landscape; to learn from the details of flowers and the behaviour of birds.

As you journey today, let your senses be filled with wonder at the love which surrounds you, so that you learn from and rejoice in the gifts of the natural world.



Before you begin

Choosing a route

Decide the length of your journey, and the sort of landscape you wish to explore. Make sure you can return from your destination, or pick a circular route. The journey can take place over consecutive days or separately if you have time constraints.



Walking wisely and safely

Do not choose a route which is too far for your level of fitness. Estimate walking speed at about 2 miles (3.25 km) per hour. Don't forget to include rest stops and a place for lunch. If you are travelling alone, you may wish to let someone know where you are going.



Things to take with you

A map (not everywhere has a phone signal), food and water including some spare in case of emergencies, a first aid kit, waterproof clothing.



Above all, bring an open mind and a heart ready to receive the gifts of the journey.

Countryside code – Respect, Protect, Enjoy!

Respect other people – consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors.

Leave gates and property as you find them and walk only on the designated paths

Protect the natural environment – leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home.

Keep dogs under effective control.

Enjoy the outdoors – plan ahead and be prepared. Follow advice and local signs.



Before you begin: collect a Pilgrim Bag

Near this leaflet you should find a brown paper pilgrim bag containing objects you might find useful for your journey. You can also use it for collecting things on your walk!

Before you begin: making a journey stick

Take a stick and some lengths of wool or string from your bag.

During the course of your journey, simply collect small objects you notice and wrap them onto the stick using the string.

They could be objects that have an interesting pattern you have noticed, such as an attractively patterned stone or one of an unusual colour. They could be signs of new life, such as a twig with buds or new leaves on it, or the casings from nuts or snail shells to act as signs of seasons past.

Take care they are not too big or they will dominate your craft, and remember that if they are alive such as young leaves or flowers, they will fade and die away from their habitat.



DISCOVERIES

Some objects might provoke reflection on an aspect of your spiritual life; others could be a reminder to pray for someone or something for which you have a concern.

You will have a selection of different types of wrapping; you may want to choose the cord to reflect the way in which the object has resonated with you – strong twine or string for something which encourages you to praise and thanksgiving for example, whereas ribbon or thread might be used to attach an object which reminds you of past events or provokes you to repentance or sorrow.



Your stick will serve as a reminder of your experience and of all that you discovered on your prayer walk.



Looking

As you walk:

Find a clear place to stand or a comfortable place to sit and look around you.



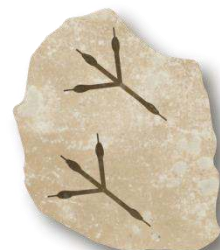
Try and imagine that you are a stranger to this planet and that you are looking at things for the first time, without knowing what they are. What patterns can you spot in your surroundings?

You might want to look upwards at a tree, and notice the patterns that the branches make against the sky. The sky itself may be patterned with clouds, or spotted with birds or aeroplanes.

Look at the skyline of the buildings and telegraph poles.

Watch how the sunlight makes shapes on the ground as shadows change and grow.

Look down at the ground – perhaps last year's dead leaves have been swept into a circle by the wind, or twigs have fallen to the ground in a particular way. Does the grass have a pattern in the way it grows?



Find one object, a stone or a plant, and examine it very closely. Look at the patterns made on its surface, the shadows and shapes. Are any the same, can you spot any similarities between objects?



Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem celebrates all the strange and unusual things that we find in creation – it is not just the traditionally beautiful objects that show God's love, but everything created.

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

Reflect:

There is a children's game that involves finding as many different things as possible to fit in a matchbox – it is one worth playing as an adult! Take the small white box from your bag and fill it with small things.



Once the box is full, take the time to examine each tiny object carefully. See how perfectly it has been made, think how much care God has lavished on its creation, and how much he loves us, His own children, perfect in His sight.



Pray:

God of creation and re-creation, help me to be mindful of the wonders that surround me. Help me to journey reflectively, taking time to consider my spiritual landscape.

As well as the countryside that surrounds me,
And help me to rejoice in both. Amen



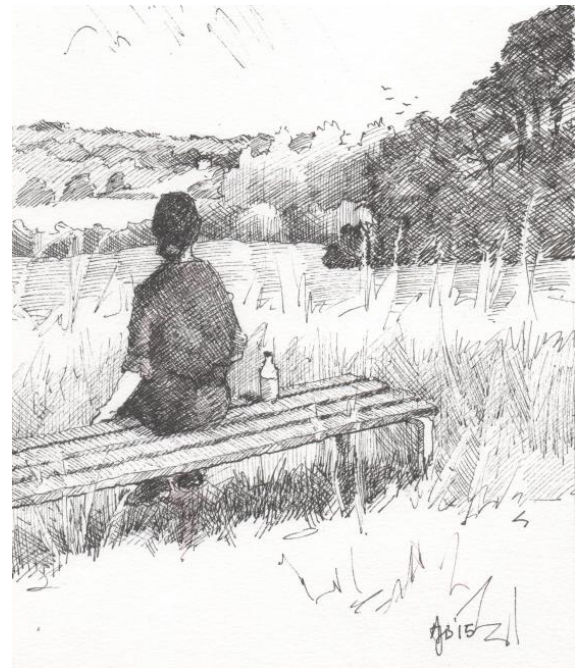
Reflect:

R S Thomas warns us here of the perils of rushing heedlessly on with our lives, ignoring the gifts of God which surround us.

The Bright Field

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you



Pray:

'This is the day that the Lord has made,

let us rejoice and be glad in it.' (Psalm 118:24)

Touching

As you walk:



Take note of the different textures that surround you - try to touch and feel as many as you can.



Notice the wind on your face – is there moisture in air, is it blowing cold or warm? How does the air make you feel – energised and brisk or relaxed and comforted?



If you wish, and if it is safe to do so, take your shoes off and walk barefoot for a while. Choose different surfaces to explore with your feet – a path or some grass, a flowerbed or a road. How tender are your feet! What feelings are triggered in your mind by these unaccustomed sensations?



Take some pieces of grass or vegetation between your fingers – you don't have to pick them to explore their shape and texture. Close your eyes and concentrate just on what you can feel.

Reflect:

Find some soil and hold it in your hand. Examine it closely – see how it is made up of many different things; tiny stones, mud, plant-based material. Wonder at the potential for growth and nurture contained within this small handful of earth and then look around you to see this potential multiplied again and again.



Remember that we have been created stewards of this earth, to care for it and to share its resources with others, and pray for the grace to play our proper part within God's creation.

Pray:

Lord God who has taught us only to ask and it will be given to us, we give you thanks for the beauties of your creation, and the love from which it sprang.

We pray for nations and countries, that seedtime and harvest may endure until the coming of your kingdom on earth and the revelation of your true glory. Amen



Reflect:

For a journey of any sort to change us, we must be willing to change. Sometimes this process is refreshing and simple; at other times we may find pain and difficulty in growth and development.

Take the stone from your bag and examine it closely. Notice its patterns and shape – uneven at times. So too in our lives and our relationships there will be things that go well and others that do not.

Hold the stone in your hand and as it warms, pray that God will melt the cold, hard places in your heart.



Pray:

I will give you a new heart
and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone
and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)



Listening

As you walk:



Walking as quietly as you can, listen carefully for the different sounds that are all around you.

Clicking

Laughing

Buzzing

Rustling

Squelching

Don't be afraid to crouch down by a large patch of undergrowth or near some long grass – if you are very quiet you may even hear the rustling and clicking of beetles and other large insects.

Allow all the sounds to merge and blend into a wonderful symphony of creation, a natural orchestra whose playing is so often ignored but which provides the rhythm and music of our lives.



Reflect:

Prayer is conversation with God, which involves listening as well as speaking. Answered prayers are wonderful things in which all can rejoice; they affirm our faith and deepen our trust. However, not all prayers are answered in a way that we like, or even recognise – these occasions offer a challenge to us which should be met head on and brought back to God. Sometimes we have to be quiet and still to hear God's voice; sometimes it seems as if we do not hear it at all, so great is the sound of our busyness, or our pain or our anger.



'I am a feather on
the breath of God'

Pray:

Drop Thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire thy coolness
and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm. (Garrett Horder 1884)



Smelling

As you walk:

Our sense of smell is located in the olfactory bulb which is part of the brain's limbic system – an area that deals with our emotions and is strongly linked to our memories. The delight of our sense of smell is that it can call up memories and powerful associations.



As you walk, take especial notice of the different scents which you can detect. What is the atmosphere like? Is it dry and hot – can you sense the temperature of the air you breath in?

Is it damp or rainy – are you aware of humidity in the atmosphere?

Notice the smells of different landscapes – not just the obvious ones such as the scent of pine if you walk through a wood, but the occasional drifts of scent which are carried on the wind – the sharp smell of mice perhaps, or the heavy scent of mushrooms and fungus.



Reflect:

Find five different objects from the natural world. They do not need to be ones with a traditionally strong scent such as flowers or grass. Find a stick or a handful of soil, dead leaves as well as green ones.

Hold each object to your nose and breathe in the scent of it, focussing all your concentration upon it. Does the smell remind you of anything? Are these memories good or painful? Rejoice in the good ones and ask God for his healing love for those which bring back less joyful occasions.



Pray:

'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these....Strive first for the kingdom of God^[1] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

(Matthew 6:28,29,33)



Tasting

As you walk:



It may not be easy to find things to taste during your journey – and it would be very unwise to experiment with eating anything which you are not absolutely certain about!



However, depending on the time of year, there may be things you can gather and eat along the way – wild strawberries, perhaps, hidden close to the ground or black berries shining

amongst the brambles in hedgerows.

If you are unable to find anything safe to eat yourself, try looking for food which might be suitable for animals or birds – clusters of bright berries hanging from trees and bushes; stalks of wheat, oats and rye ripening in fields; insects scuttling rapidly across the path in front of you.



Reflect:

Settle yourself so that you can be comfortable and still for several minutes, relaxed but alert, ready to focus and prepared to turn your mind to the activity of the moment.

Take a raisin or the chocolate heart from the bag. Hold it close to your nose, taking in some slow, deep breaths, allowing its fragrance to reach to the back of your throat. Notice the reaction of your mouth and the rest of your body to the smell of food.

Carefully and thoughtfully place the raisin or chocolate on your tongue, holding it in your mouth for a few moments, rolling it on your tongue, feeling with your tongue what you felt previously with your fingers.

Bite into it, sensing it against your teeth, noticing its taste in various parts of your mouth.

When you have finished chewing, swallow carefully, being aware of the many different muscles in your mouth and throat that make up the swallowing action. When you have swallowed, notice how the after taste lingers on your tongue and in your mouth.

Pray:

*Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Psalm 34:8)*

Finishing well

Take time to reflect on your journey.

Thank God for all you have experienced.

