

- I. Advanced Organizer
 - A. What do these movies have in common?
 - 1. **The Wizard of Oz**
 - 2. **O Brother, Where Art Thou**
 - 3. **Easy Rider**
 - 4. **Rain Man**
 - 5. **Planes, Trains, and Automobiles**
 - 6. **Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1**
 - 7. **Thelma and Louise**
 - 8. **The Muppet Movie**
 - B. **Road Movies**
 - 1. The **Road Movie is a motif that a lot of screenwriters employ** in which the main characters leaves home on some excursion and end up traveling around from place to place, typically altering their perspective from their everyday life.
 - 2. Students of film recognize that the Road Movie as a genre has roots that go way **back in literary history** to spoken and written tales of epic journeys such as **Homer's *Odyssey* or literary classics like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.**
 - C. Starting with this today because it's connected to what we're considering together this morning. Taking a break from our Vision Conversation to return to a series we'll be considering throughout the year from time to time: **"Soul Care In Seasons of Stress"**. How do we care for our spirits and souls in the midst of what feels like trying times to many of us? Learning together spiritual practices that some of us have found helpful, nurturing to our spirits. David has shared with us about meditation, Connie has shared about Bible Study, Celia shared about poetry.
 - D. Today we're going to talk about an ancient practice that has played a role in many christian's lives throughout the centuries, the **practice of walking a prayer labyrinth**. It's practice both Ginny, who crafted our labyrinth today, and myself have found meaningful. (I'll share a bit about that shortly.)
 - E. Like the Road Movie, the **Labyrinth is connected to the perspective that life is best understood as a journey** - a sojourn from one place to another, with twists and turns along the way that leaves us transformed in some way through the journeying. Particularly, the labyrinth sees the life of faith as being a spiritually connected journey, a road trip in which we travel with the hopes of encountering the Divine in some way and being transformed by that encounter.
- II. For Jesus followers, **the narrative of the journey is woven throughout the stories of the Bible**.
 - A. Throughout the pages of our ancient texts we see central stories featuring characters like Abraham, Moses, the Israelites camping in the desert, following a God whose presence is mobile, centered on a tent. It's a story of journeying, of moving, of going somewhere.
 - B. Eventually, the people settle down in the promised land, and build a temple in the Holy City of Jerusalem. And as worship there was established, so was another practice involving journeying: **the ancient practice of pilgrimage**. Observant Jews from throughout Ancient Israel took a road trip three times every year to worship in Jerusalem: the festivals of Tabernacles, Passover, and The Festival of Weeks. **This was a communal spiritually connected journey**, as ancient literary sources describe huge crowds of Jews singing and playing music as they processed on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Book of Psalms itself includes **15 Psalms that were specifically intended for this purpose, called the Psalms of Ascent**.

- C. As the Biblical Story unfolds, we see that the New Testament only furthers the theme of the life of faith as a journey. **Jesus is the ultimate sojourner**, sent from heaven to live amongst the inhabitants of earth, to journey through an earthly life.
 - D. And **he lives a transient life**. He's born on the road, in a stable as his parents are on a road trip. His first trip from there isn't back to the nursery prepared for him in Nazareth, but to Egypt, where he spends the toddler years of his life. Once back in Israel, Jesus learned the way of pilgrim like other Jewish boys of his day. He made the tracks to Jerusalem. We hear the story from Luke about how his family lost him coming back from the festival, only to find him studying with the rabbis in the temple.
 - E. Eventually, **when its time for Jesus to do the ministry he was sent to do, he does it as an itinerant preacher, a celibate single man with no family to tie him down, and no home to call his own**. His family is the followers he calls around himself, his home is wherever he is welcomed as he travels to share the coming of the Kingdom of God. At times we see him and his crew make the pilgrimages back to Jerusalem, where miracles and challenges of the religious systems both happen along the way.
 - F. Like the most epic of road movies, **there were climactic moments in Jesus' earthly road trip**. His road trip took him to the cross. It took him through death, to the depths of evil. And there in death, he brought transformation. He brought new life. He was gloriously resurrected, making the last leg of the journey from death to life, paving the way so that those who follow behind him can travel it, too.
 - G. And **that is what he was inviting his followers into**. He was inviting them to follow him on an epic road trip. It's clear that the early church understood that. Look at the stories in Acts – Paul, Peter, Barnabus – these guys traveled a lot. They felt compelled to live a life on the road following Jesus.
 - H. While not everyone who came to put faith in Jesus was invited to follow him in his itinerant preaching days, or would be sent like the early apostles to start churches, **throughout history, many people of faith have come to recognize that, whatever their life circumstance, Jesus was inviting them into a journey of following him as well**. A journey that recognizes that the present is important, but it is not the final destination. Our life is oriented toward the coming of God's healing presence in the world, the Kingdom of God coming fully and redeeming everything around us, and we're all sojourners participating in that process, whether our address changes or not.
- III. One way that Christians through the century have embodied this quest to live a spiritually connected journey has been **through adopting a practice similar to their Jewish forefathers, the practice of pilgrimage**. As followers of Jesus became spread throughout the world, certain places were seen as important destinations for journeying, in the same way that Jews like Jesus journeyed regularly to Jerusalem. These pilgrimages set the Christians off on physical sojourns that pointed to the bigger journey they understood themselves to be a part of.
- A. It's important to note - Jews and Christians aren't the only ones to pursue pilgrimages. Observant Muslims believe they are called to do a pilgrimage to Mecca.
 - B. For many centuries, Christian have travelled to sites like the Holy Lands in Israel and Palestine, Rome, Santiago de Compostela (Spain), and the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico.
 - C. What does all this have to do with the **Labyrinth**?
 - 1. **Labyrinth developed as a practice for Christians who wanted to experience the spiritual fruit of pilgrimage**, but were not able logistically to travel to one of the Holy Sites. If you couldn't take a pilgrimage in person, perhaps a virtual one still had merit.

2. The first historical record of Christians using the labyrinths in Churches was in 324 A.D. in Algiers. They became quite popular across Europe during the Middle Ages when pilgrimages to the Holy Land were dangerous. As a spiritual discipline, the faithful set out on pilgrimages to designated cathedrals where labyrinths were built and often referred to as “journeys to Jerusalem.” The most well known Christian labyrinth was built in the floor of the great Catholic Cathedral in Chartres, France in 1201. (pictures)
 3. Today, **labyrinths have been rediscovered and are being built and “walked” as a tool of spiritual growth and emotional well being.** A prayer walk labyrinth provides a metaphor model of our Christian life journey as we face many turns we did not expect in our search for a quiet center. Some gently curving sections of the prayer walk allow us to move easily and quickly; others slow us down and catch our attention as they turn us abruptly in the opposite direction. The path may begin by leading us deceptively toward the center, only to circle around it and then move away.
- D. **I remember the first time I was invited to pray through a labyrinth.**
1. Skeptical. Mat laid out on floor of a graduate school class on Spiritual Practices. This one seemed hokey to me.
 2. Our teacher had invited us to consider walking in with a question for God, then wait in the center for an answer or a sense of clarity or God’s presence, and then walk out out, praying through what we had received. She encouraged us to take the pace at whatever seemed right for each of us as we considered out question to God. Invited to pray the question again and again, each step of the way.
 3. This was a few months before I was slated to move to Berkeley. I had been painfully cut-off from my sponsoring denomination. There was way more uncertainty than there was clarity. The question that seemed most natural and honest to me, “Are you leading me, God?”
 4. When we reached the center, encouraged to stop asking and listen. To take as much time as we needed. To see if the Spirit spoke something into our mind or heart. Standing in the center, I had a profound moment with Jesus. As I asked “Are you leading me?”...
 - a) “Yes. But I’m also sending you.” Understood that my experience of Jesus might at times feel more like being sent out ahead to blaze the trail, than following in someone else’s tracks. I was reminded in that moment that the term “Apostle” was the greek *apostolos*, meaning literally “the sent ones”. In the same way, Jesus was asking me to take steps out my comfort zone, trusting he was sending me, even as he would also go ahead of me.
 5. As I left the center of the labyrinth, it was a different experience. Each step those words echoing, invitations from Jesus to see the journey not simply as neat path to carefully follow but a path to walk in hope, even where the path was not yet clear, that God was journeying with me, that he was bringing order to my steps and would back up the moves I made.
- E. In a little bit, I’m gonna give you some instructions for us as we prepare to walk our own labyrinth pilgrimages. But first, we’re gonna take a moment to look over some of the prayers that the ancient Israelites prayed and sang on their way to Jerusalem, as they pilgrimaged singing Psalms of Ascent. Each one seems to highlight that this journey of faith has different kinds of moments, but each is an opportunity for deeper connection with God. As you hear them, imagine a throng pilgrims singing them every year as they make their way to Jerusalem. Every good road trip needs a soundtrack. These were some of their songs. Hoping these might give us a bit of inspiration as we prepare for our own embodied reflection on journey today.

F. The Journey Begins

1. Psalm 120, v. 1-2, 5-7:

*"In my distress I cry to the Lord,
that he may answer me:*

*2 "Deliver me, O Lord,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue....*

*Woe is me, that I am an alien in Meshech,
that I must live among the tents of Kedar.*

*6 Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.*

*7 I am for peace;
but when I speak,
they are for war."*

- a) you can sense the longing in the Psalmist. Crying out to God to take him or her into another reality. Recognizes that those he is among are not his own. Feels like an alien in stress and danger. Can you relate? This is where the people of God invited the journey of pilgrimage to begin from.

G. The Journey Is Better With Others

1. Psalm 122: 1-4

*'I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"*

*2 Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.*

*3 Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.*

*4 To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord."*

2. Joy in doing this pilgrimage together. Being a part of something bigger than yourself. Celebration of community, of the particular place God's presence was often experienced profoundly, of the richness of journeying there with others.

H. When the Journey Humbles You

1. Psalm 131, 1-3

*"O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.*

*2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.*

*3 O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and forevermore."*

2. Sometimes leaving the rut of our every day life opens us up to see new vistas that can restore our perspective, and remind us how small we are before God. Bring us to a place of humble trust.

I. Call to Praise

1. Psalm 134,1-3
*"Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
 who stand by night in the house of the Lord!
 2 Lift up your hands to the holy place,
 and bless the Lord.
 3 May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth,
 bless you from Zion."*
2. The journey begins with desperation and ends with worship and a call to unite with others, even in the darkness of night to celebrate God.

IV. **As we journey through the labyrinth:**

- A. There is no right or wrong way to walk the prayer labyrinth. The only rules are to respect the prayer walk and others who are there. Simply begin, focusing on a quiet mind and open heart that allows God to accompany you.
- B. **An often used process for the walk includes:**
 1. **The Journey In:** as you open your mind to spend this time in the presence of God.
 2. **The Center:** where you can pause, pray or simply "be in the moment."
 3. **The Journey Out:** that allows you to reflect and gradually return to your daily world.
- C. Please enter and remain in silence throughout the walk.
- D. When you reach the center, you may want to pause and experience God's presence and/or offer a prayer.
- E. Each person can establish the timing for walking the prayer path. You may need to step aside and allow someone walking more quickly to pass or you may quietly and carefully pass another person.
- F. For the journey, consider a **mode of reflection** that feels right for you. Take a packet with these prompts and a few others and choose what feels best for you:
 1. Could reflect on the **psalms of ascent**, praying these verses as you go at different points. Or you could reflect on them before and after, seeing how they change your perspective.
 2. **Bringing God Your Question.** As your Journey In, consider asking a question to God again, and again, meditating on what it is you are really asking. At the Center, be quiet before God and listen for an answer. As you Journey out, take with you what you received, whether it be a word, a sense of comfort, or peace of mind.
 3. **Releasing Worries and Cares.** As you Journey In, lay down a worry or care with each step, remembering that Christ said, "Come to me all who are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." At the Center, thank God for the peace resulting from the walk in and pray for continued peace as you journey out.
 4. **Discovering Your Vocation or Calling.** As you Journey In, listen for God's message to you, asking for his support. At the Center, concentrate on the gifts and talents he has given you. As you Journey Out, pray for guidance and strength to equip and sustain you in His service.
 5. **A Walk of Remembrance.** As you Journey In, remember the person or event you are focusing on; the joys and special times you shared. If it's an event, feel the joy of experiencing that special time and the people who helped make it such a blessing. In the Center, thank God for this person or event that has made your life special. On the Journey Out, open your mind and heart to people and/or events that currently add meaning to your life.