

THE INVITATION

Come on a journey with me. Let's us go to the House of the Lord....6127 miles away. **Picture of Iona from the airplane** This is Iona Scotland as viewed from air. Iona is a small island, 3.5x1.5 miles in size and is located off the western coast of Scotland. Mary DeJong describes Iona, Scotland as a "particular place, both historically and geographically....a small sanctuary like island seemingly hanging onto the skirt of the known world." [\[1\]](#)

Picture of the abbey Iona Scotland is a pilgrimage site for thousands of travelers each year. From all over the world, travelers trek to Iona for varied reasons. Many travelers come only for the day to see the iconic Abbey. Others may spend at least a few days in a quiet pilgrimage or a quest of some sort.

For me, I treasure the peace, rest, gratitude, and closeness to God all of which I experience on Iona. My trip a few weeks ago in May was my 6th trek to Iona, Loren's 3rd, and Joan's 7th! Esther Clark and Jane Croyle in the congregation have been to Iona. Has anyone else traveled to Iona?

Before you cringe and think this is a travel report with endless pictures, don't worry....this does lead to a scriptural reflection!! There's got to be pictures with this sermon, and I am taking you to Iona.

THE JOURNEY

The trip to Iona is not for the faint of heart; you really must want to get there! While flight patterns vary, our most recent trip included a flight from Newark to Reykjavik, Iceland with 2 hour layover which turned into 5 hours....which delayed all of the other legs of the trip....there are a lot of legs of a trip to get to Iona. Once we finally departed Reykjavik, we flew into Glasgow, Scotland. We found a cab to the Queen Street train station, **Train Ride Rainbow** took a 3-hour train trip through gorgeous landscape to Oban. This train trek was featured on a PBS show which highlights amazing train trips, you may see sites such as beautiful rainbows arcing over a village or **Train Ride stone building** other quaint settings or amazing mountains and waterfalls.

At the conclusion of the 3-hour train ride, we arrived in Oban, where we fell into our beds 29 hours after we left Huntingdon. The following morning, rejuvenated from a good night's rest and a fortifying Scottish breakfast, we continued the trek. **sea** We boarded a ferry for a 45 minute sail across the Firth of Lorn, an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean. The beauty of this trip includes this picturesque **castle**.

At the village Craignure (craig-an YOOR), we climbed aboard a bus for a 75-minute ride across the island of Mull. **Narrow bridges** This bus ride is the most challenging leg of travel for me as the double decker bus maneuvers the one-track road. There are multiple layovers along the road which the drivers kindly follow an unspoken set of manners for a one-track road. The bus amazingly squeezes onto narrow stone bridges, manages the multiple twists and turns of the country road, and coaxes highland cattle or sheep to vacate the road so the bus can continue its trip. While crossing Mull, we see the village of Bunessan which is where the tune name later used for Morning Has Broken originated.

Approaching Iona At Fionnphort (finn-a-fort), finally....Iona is in sight. After 2 planes, a cab, a train, a ferry, and bus, we catch the very last leg of the trip.... another ferry for a 10-minute ride to Iona crossing the Sound of Iona. Stepping off the ferry onto the Holy Island of Iona is a moment that I wish every one of you could experience. **View of the village** Iona is a place of simplicity even though we recognize the permanent residents, of which there are 182, have a life of hard work and sometimes inconvenience of lack of immediate medical care or the need for students in grade 7 and beyond to travel to boarding school weekly. **North** Iona is a place of great beauty of nature including the ocean, rocky shores, and the magnificent creation of God.

South Iona is not only an amazing geographic location known for its wide variety of stones which vary on each side of the island, Iona is also a community of faithful servants engaged with God, engaged with church, and engaged with the world. Chris King sums up the values of the Iona Community by writing: “Rooted in a concern for healing, building community, and supporting people in the journey of faith, there is a commitment to solidarity with those who are disadvantaged and to sharing in the creation of a just and peaceful world.”[\[2\]](#)

We landed on Iona for the week, and the pilgrimage to this Holy Island was quite the trek.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Our scripture text for the day describes a pilgrimage to the city of Jerusalem which our biblical ancestors undertook to celebrate a major festival. They trekked to Jerusalem three times a year for major festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, or the Feast of Tabernacles.

The pilgrims had quite the trek to Jerusalem....not with the modern benefits like we have of planes, trains, cars, and ferries. They had their sturdy feet! And, they didn't have a playlist of favorite songs that they could play on constant repeat. They had their voices which they joined together in community. I like to think that the rhythm and cadence of their joined voices strengthened them as they walked the journey to “the house of the Lord.” These folks were not vacationers or sightseers. It was decreed that they made these pilgrimages. Maybe they didn't start out on the journey filled with joy...or feeling so glad...we don't know. Perhaps, the songs encouraged them on the journey.

The travelers sang with gratitude as they arrived at the city gates. Imagine reaching the gates with tired, dusty, weary, arthritic, and calloused feet and yet still lifting voices joined together in gratitude.

Our Psalm continues with intercessory prayer. There is prayer for all who live within Jerusalem and that peace may extend to family and friends of the worshippers. There is prayer that the worshippers will work for peace, health, and safety. The beneficiaries of these prayers are family, friends, and the House of the Lord. The psalmist conveyed the need....the commitment to work for peace....not just the absence of conflict....but completeness, health, justice, and protection. The world does not provide this peace. Real peace comes from our faith in God as we go to the house of the lord... Whatever that means for us....as we worship....as we reach out a hand to help others. One commentary said this pilgrimage is more than a long and dangerous walk. It is about the soul in community with others and with God.

BACK TO IONA

Stained Glass

On the island of Iona, the ancient Abbey is the centerpiece... “The house of the Lord” and a destination for those on a pilgrimage....for the soul in community with others and with God.

Here is a snapshot of Iona's history:

“Iona is perhaps most famous for the 563 AD arrival of the Irish monk Columba and his companions, for whom the island served as a home base for their mission of spreading Christianity.”[\[3\]](#) Columba's great monastic center of learning created “Wandering Saints,” Celtic monks who traveled from Iona in the early middle ages to preach and teach. They got as far as Kiev.[\[4\]](#)

Abbey with the cross in shadows

Over the centuries, Iona fell into ruin. Vikings came ashore and plundered the Abbey stealing anything of value and slaughtering the monks. There were still farmers, crofters, on the island barely making a sustainable living throughout the centuries, but the Holy Island did not have its centerpiece of the Abbey.

West Iona was still a place of pilgrimage through these many centuries even though the Abbey remained in ruin. The island's history and the intriguing geological landscape brought tourists throughout the centuries.

Inside the Abbey

The Iona Abbey was rebuilt in the 1920-1930's. George MacLeod, a Scot who was a Presbyterian minister, was a captain in the British military during World War 1. His experience of trench warfare led to deep theological reflection. On a train with wounded soldiers returning home, he had profound experience of Christ's presence in each of those shattered, shaken bodies. His experience led him from being a military officer to a commitment of pacifism. He was known for saying, "Are you making peace today?" [\[5\]](#)

Through his conversion, MacLeod received the vision to rebuild Iona Abbey. In the depth of the depression, MacLeod found unemployed craftsman and trainee ministers and created a common life rebuilding the Abbey and thereby rebuilding self-esteem of soldiers and other persons who had lost their trades in the depression. Using some stones from the original Abbey centuries earlier, the Abbey was restored as a beautiful house of the Lord.

Travelers to Iona, especially those of us who are fortunate to live on the island for several days, can worship in the Abbey "This house of the Lord" at 9 in the morning and 9 at night. The Abbey is not heated. In many of my worship experiences over the years in the Abbey, I have heard the wind whistle around the stone walls and have seen my own breath. Even in the summer a jacket, hat, and maybe even a scarf feel good.

Iona is a pilgrimage site for students in ministry training. The week prior to our visit Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, former pastor here at Stone Church and currently a seminary professor, was visiting Iona with a group of her Church of the Brethren students including Rachel Witkovsky, daughter of Kim and Dave.

As Loren and I were at worship one of the evenings, I sat down beside a young man who said his name was Gabe. **Picture of Gabe and us** I shared my name and asked where he was from. He said Maryland to which I replied that I was from Pennsylvania. Then Gabe said, "Are you Church of the Brethren?" Small world that it is, Gabe is a pastor at Beaver Creek COB in Maryland, had done a required course through my organization, and was on Iona as part of coursework for his doctorate in ministry at Fuller Seminary. He had a heads-up from the previous seminary group that Church of the Brethren folks would be on the island when he was, so he was on the watch.

WHERE DO YOU FIND THE HOUSE OF GOD?

altar

This restored house of the Lord on Iona welcomes thousands of visitors every year.worship in the Abbey is awe-inspiring....the Lord's Prayer spoken in the worshipers native tongue....music echoing off the stone walls.... the opportunities to reflect on God's call on our lives in silent times of reflections fill the worshippers with deep awareness of God's presence.

The Iona Community is now spread wide. Some members remain at the Abbey while others are spread worldwide, but they all value diversity within the Community. An open and inclusive community, many persons find their home within the Iona Community as they know they are a Child of God loved, welcomed, and embraced.

As we spend time on Iona, the entire island feels like it is the "house of the Lord" and not just the stone Abbey.

Donna by ocean edge The treks on this Island mean different things for each person who travels. For me, Iona is a place where I remind myself to breathe deeply, to center myself in God who is my rock and my refuge, to set aside the heavy concerns I carry. I remind myself to breathe deeply and soak in the peace. I search for a meaningful stone to carry as a reminder when the days get tough that God is my Rock and fills me with what I need for each day.

I rest in the moments of worship within the walls of the Abbey and outside the walls as we view the amazing creation of God. As we hike or as we pause to catch our breath....From ancient hills and rocks.....to the currents and tides of the ocean....to the winds....and rains and rainbows which appear.....all of these calm the spirit and stir within us a sense of worship of God the Master Creator calling us to be stewards of this creation.

The ocean tides remind us of rhythm and movement. Rhythms of rest and work, of stillness and activity, of quiet and sound are crucial in our lives of wellbeing. Many Celtic prayers remind us of the rhythms and seasons of life. They recall for us the intricate and marvelous patterns in nature and seasons.[\[6\]](#)

As much as I love Iona and hope to return there again....we can worship much closer to home. In our beloved Stone Church building, in nature locations closer to your home....in a special spot in your house....anywhere, at any point, you can take a deep breath and commune with God. George Macleod, the founder of the Iona Community said, "God is thus to be discovered, encountered and experienced 'in the midst' of life—in the hurly-burly and daily routine of our lives, in and through our relationships, not just tranquil moments and remote, beautiful places like Iona."[\[7\]](#)

The pilgrims in Psalm 122 formed a community as they sang together and prayed for peace. The pilgrims on the island of Iona form community as we worship together and value the beauty of creation. And this diverse community, our Stone Church community...whether gathered in person or on Zoom.....with Juniata Alums visiting for the weekend, with other guests.... whether this is your first time at Stone Church or your 1000th+, you are part of this community.....the amazing and wide reaching community of Stone Church.

Together we journey, praying for one another and ourselves, seeking ways to live out the lives to which God calls us.

We are each unique creations and we are equally loved and treasured by God. And we are always...always....invited to the house of the Lord...wherever that may be for you. As Loren plays a few moments of reflective music, I invite you to draw your attention to the half sheet within your bulletin. The picture is from one of our hikes to the ocean's edge. I simply encourage you to reflect.

[\[1\]](#) Waymarkers, p. 1.

[\[2\]](#) Pathways for Pilgrims, p. 9.

[\[3\]](#) Walking Awake on The Isle of Iona, Scotland. P. 8. Denise Crown

[\[4\]](#) Celtic Christian Spirituality, p. 10, Mary C. Earle.

[\[5\]](#) Celtic Christian Spirituality, p. 10, Mary C. Earle.

[\[6\]](#) Celtic Christian Spirituality, p. 81, Mary C. Earle.

[\[7\]](#) Pathways for Pilgrims, Chris King., p. 12.

Iona from Air



Abbey



Train Ride Rainbow



Train Ride Stone Building



Sea



Castle



Stone Bridge



Approaching Iona



Village



North



South



Stained Glass



Cross with Shadow



West



Inside Abbey



Gabe



Altar



Donna by Ocean Edge

