

It will begin



A week from today (May 22, 2018) Susanna and I will depart, God-willing, for Spain. This was her idea. I'm not sure what she was thinking:

a. She does this and so I can do this; b. 493 miles of up and down will be good for me; c. delivering babies should be punctuated by long periods of hiking; d. She hates her daddy and this is a clever way to get back at him; e. God might meet us on the trail; Ok Ok f. this will be a good experience for me, I can use some time away from 35 years in Dartmouth and we will have an awesome time together; g. If I crash and burn she is an experienced R.N. and speaks Spanish. Pero sigo pensando que ella estra loca.

I told my other daughter, Jocelyn, that I was apprehensive of this trip because I fear failing at accomplishing it. Isn't that funny? Actually I fear *not* making it out of the first week which is in the Pyrenees mountains. Napoleon tortured his troops there.

Positives> I have been walking for almost a year and a half. I now wear an 18 lb. pack while I walk. I bought cool-guy hiking shoes, two pair. It will be June. The Spanish don't hate Americans. I'm coming back a lean, mean, hiking machine. Susanna and I share the same insano sense of humor and she will receive the software update on that from me. Renée is happy to let me go to do this with Susanna. I will walk into Panera after July 16th and people will go, "So you're awesome now eh?" Nah. Prob. not.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 1 Comment May 22, 2018 1 MinuteEdit "It will begin"

Five days til

Does prayer make a difference when one undertakes a long hike? I can't think of a particular place in the Bible where hiking is said to be blessed (let alone air travel, except of course for eagles). I CAN think of biblical hikes however: Moses in the Sinai; Hagar in Beersheba; Jesus in the wilderness; Paul across the Pisidian frontier... in each case God was there. His providence guided and He spoke to these. Being without Wi-Fi, daily duties, chores, my friends will be a challenge. This is what Susanna prescribes. But I am grateful for any who remember me in prayer while I am on this pilgrimage. I could use a burning bush or transfiguring moment.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 1 Comment May 24, 2018 0 MinutesEdit "Five days til"

The day



Today (Tuesday) Susanna and I depart tonight for London and thence, to France and a Camino beginning on Saturday, quickly crossing the Spanish border and into Spain. I am taking one pair of shoes, two pairs of pants, two hiking shirts, two hiking t-shirts (very light weight and cotton), a jacket, a rain jacket, socks and stuff, and electronics. I am also taking a small Gideon N.T. Susanna and I will each carry a back pack and a hiking umbrella. That's it. It will be the first time ever Renée has lived alone—and my first long-term hiking trip. My request to God is for safety of course, as it would be embarrassing to come home early due to injury, and for Him to speak to me on this trail. I ask the same for Susanna. I do not presume to know what He might communicate to me. I just hope that He does. I leave behind a church in good hands. Lynn will manage the "day to day" and several capable and fine elders will shepherd the flock. This church has not been without me for more than two weeks in 35 years. This will be good for them, and of course I will be praying for them all along.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment May 29, 2018 1 Minute

Day One



We left Biarritz, France via taxi to get to the eastern terminus since we found out French rail is on strike. St Jean Pied de Port was charming as were the people in the Camino office. So we launched out. The weather was beautiful, a thing for which to be grateful. The walk was often flat, sometimes up and by day's end I was exhausted. Five miles today, which was the plan. We are in Argenguy tonight, and Evelyn is making supper for us—she seems to be the only one in the Hotel Clementenia. Bunk houses (alburgues) will come soon enough—tonight, one more hotel. I had to stop while walking often—which is embarrassing. But Susanna is vastly patient and so we stop, take a drink and resume. 5 1/2 hours later, we came upon the Clementenia and Evelyn. She is French and says Spain is across the river. She sounds exactly like Ana Ferro! As to Day One spiritualities, I can say the quiet was magnificent. And, as Leon DeHart in Roanoke went home to be with the Lord this week—I am moved at this loss and prayed for his family so much today. Point: quiet and solitude and pastoral scenery make for a nice prayer environment. Also we read James 1:1-5 and thought about it, since the "Camino de Santiago" means "the Way of St. James." The legend is that James the Apostle came to NW Spain, attempted to

share the Gospel, was not received well and returned to Jerusalem. He was martyred there in about 44 AD. Two disciples then took his body back to Galicia (NW Spain) and buried it. Then, in the 9th century his tomb was discovered, and the cathedral ended up there. Well, true or not it hardly matters. I am already in love with his epistle.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 2 Comments June 2, 2018 1 MinuteEdit "Day One"

Day Four



The longest three point one miles of my life. From the village of Espinal to Vizcarret. Took four hours and then two naps. Charming little Basque village of 70 people. But some 300,000 pilgrims this year, Susanna thinks. My classy backpack is giving me

problems with incessant neck pain—we're working on it. There is a 50 foot wall in the town that is clearly a ruin. But it is re-faced with a new surface on which townspeople used to play squash or some such game. The wall ruin is clearly ancient but a kind and friendly local person is sure the section dates only to 1903. It looks like the side of a medieval cathedral. The town's church is also real old and only about 6 people, ancient themselves, still attend mass there. We ate supper at a one room cafe, local bread, ham and sheep-cheese sandwich and a tray of olives. We were totally content. Oh==and a Coke Zero. We are only 22 miles in but except for a rogue text message from the elders back home, I am totally relaxed. The quiet; the running stream water; did I mention the quiet? And Susanna's relentless positive approach are infectious. I am praying all the time, especially when I awaken at night. I am praying for family, for the elders, for the things of the church back home, and for random other things. I am also asking the Lord Jesus to speak to my heart.

[thedarknesswiththelight](#) Uncategorized Leave a comment June 5, 2018 1 Minute

Day Eight (I think)

We walked into Pamplona today, about 40 miles since beginning. It feels like about 400. We are still in Navarra, the Basque state in Spain and the people everywhere are so friendly—except the few Americans we meet who are embarrassingly rude and dismissive. Sheesh.

Last night we hiked up to Zabaldika Convent/hostel ("albergue") and spent the evening with 14 pilgrims, from England, Sweden, Korea, Poland, Germany, Taiwan and France. The four Sisters of the Sacred Heart (Jesus' heart) were old and wise. And very gracious. Susanna ratted me out as a "pastor" (they asked me if

I was "Presbooteerian") and they honored me to ask the blessing at the dinner of tuna salad, spaghetti, melon + cheese, bread and wine; then invited me to "share" about why I am doing the Camino, to read from John 15 in the 13th century church, and to climb into the belfry (up the spiraled, stone stair) and ring the 1377 bell once. Which I did. They were all very friendly and kind.

Today was 4.2 easy miles into Pamplona. Susanna is now doing laundry in the albergue, and then we will find dinner. Over a fish & okra sandwich which Susanna brought me, I chatted with Fred from France, who is Norman and fun to chat with. His daughter is a summer guide to the Normandy Invasion beaches.

Last night we were moved to hear a Polish young woman (Olivia) share about the 4 "little miracles" she says she has been granted on her hike. She is a beautiful, but wounded young woman, desperately seeking God in this hike. We also got to know a grieving Peruvian man who recently lost his wife, daughter and brother. He was soaking up the Sisters' mercy and kindness.

The walking is hard for me, and I may ship my backpack home and find some other way to tote my things. Susanna has been kind and sacrificial to me and endlessly delighted in her own discoveries of the Camino. I continue in prayer for many back home, especially those of recent surgeries and troubles of different kinds.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment June 9, 2018 1 Minute Edit "Day Eight (I think)"

Day 10

It is a striking thing to find myself plopped down in the middle of a big place that is completely, 100% devoid of any Protestantism whatsoever. This may seem trivial (as it seems to Susanna). But for me such a moment has only been when on a missions trip or on a vacation trip when there are no or few spiritual kin around. On this trip the "kin" are peregrinos, pilgrims on the Camino. But no Christians—or at least no t-shirt wearing, K-Love touting, reflexive-huggers. None. No one touting Christian rhetoric. No one hungrily looking to strike up spiritual conversation. But ALL old-world Catholic, and all the time. In every village and hamlet stands an ancient church, tall and silent bulwarks against the siege of modern culture and trending stuff that flit and tweedle around at their massive stone-and-block foundations. The Spanish people are relaxed and fun loving. The radio announcers are fast-talking (although I do not understand their words) and upbeat. The sun is bright like Denver. The Arga River is clear and quick. The service people are courteous, routine and kind. I can see a bit why Ernest Hemingway loved Spain and found it so refreshing. He came to Pamplona nine times. Susanna seems so comfortable here of course because of her fluency in Spanish even though this is her first trip to Europe. She moves among the people easily and unthreatened. I however, bring all my Americo-centricisms and cannot stop comparing here to home. Then, I remember that Spanish history traces to the pre-Roman Basque, the Romans, the Visigoths, the Moors, and so forth and that all their internal evolution occurred long, long before Jamestown and Plymouth! It makes my own patriotism seem small somehow—or at least young. I do remember that Spain did not contribute to the quelling of the Kaiser, der untergang of the Fuhrer,

the silencing of the Imperial Japanese empire, the blocking of Leninism/Stalinism/Maoism and Uncle Ho—almost as if she just wasn't interested. Nor did she commission any great apologists to defend the Gospel in any sense. She seems little interested in Anglo-Germanic science or politics—her energies have been focused, since colonialism ended, on her own powerful and internal distinctives. Since the sinking of the Armada her "Id" has been one kingdom besieging another, all internal and crowned by royal names I have never known (except Franco, of whom I know mainly from the old SNL Weekend Update with Chevy Chase: "this just in—Generalissimo Francisco Franco is still dead"). Spain has really needed no Madonna, no Beatles, no Indy 500, no Bud Light, no Disney, no progressivism, no crassly industrial Apple/Google/General Motors/McDonalds/Broadway and no ADD/ADHD/ODD pharmacacia or counseling and little enough EPA/OSHA/TSA, metal detectors, health care reform, racial/gender/food justice or sensitivity training. Plain enough, WiFi is everywhere. Smoking is so common it is alarming. "Prohibido fumar" signs are rare. Ciggie machines are everywhere. In Spain they speak Spanish. Not Bolivian Spanish or Puerto Rican Spanish. Just Spanish. No one has to apologize for being Spanish even though 300,000 multi-national Camino pilgrims per year now meander through northern Spain. Spain is Spain. Oye Napoleon—You no like? Go back to France

[thedarknesswiththelight](#) Uncategorized Leave a comment June 11, 2018 2 Minutes Edit "Day 10"

Day 12

We are doing short stints on the Camino—three to five miles and my first seven is coming soon. This is a challenge for Susanna and me both: for her who is used to long trail sections, me who is used to nothing. But as we came into Lorca, still in Basque territory we are finding some stride. I am also sick,

as I came down with a bad cold three days ago. Now it is in my lungs. The albergue mistress was very kind, went home and got some cough syrup for me—there is no pharmacy in this village—and gave Susanna an onion on a plate to put in our room. She says it helps one not to cough at night. Susanna walked in the afternoon sun over to the next village looking for a pharmacy, found one, but it was closed for four hours of siesta. I will survive on these kindnesses. Tomorrow we go to the next town and I will attempt the backpack again.

On this hike one focuses on several simple corpuses of thought: 1) body, 2) the person you're hiking with, 3) God, 4) the ever-annoying other-hikers passing you, 5) the status of the snack bag, 6) your equipment, 7) the next coffee stop and 8) the weather and 9) the lodging. That's about it. Those are the things that matter. Not much else matters at all.

As to body—other than being cold-burdened at the moment, my left leg has developed an intermittent pain. Susanna says it's the "I-T band." I didn't know I had an I-T band. (I knew I had an I.T. Deficiency but that's another story). My feet are good and the Brooks shoes, so far, have been excellent. It has been unusually cold this month so far—today was a good example. My hands get cold and I have no gloves. My weight is diminishing, and my hunger is almost non-existent. My blood pressure fell off thirty points as soon as I began hiking. Susanna was flabbergasted at that and immediately put in an international call to my doctor's office. She is managing my meds for me, and checks my pressure daily. She says she has never seen such a dramatic drop in pressure and surmises it was stress-driven. Now it borders on too low! My endurance is very slowly increasing, as she predicted. We shall see. I hope I can pick up the pace and wear the pack, but

neck pain is the issue there. If I cannot take the pain, we will figure something else out.

As to American music that one might occasionally hear in the Spanish albergues, thus far it has been Bob Dylan, Carole King and Pete Seeger.

More to follow..

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment June 13, 2018 2 MinutesEdit "Day 12"

Day 13

2) the person you are hiking with is critical. It occurs to me that our relationships with so many people—even among Christians—are truly unrelaxed. We too often feel "on trial". I am doing this pilgrimage with Susanna, a 33 year old outdoors-experienced, highly intelligent registered nurse. While hiking one gets sweaty, fatigued, crabby, confused perhaps even. This is a country to which neither of us has visited. That Susanna speaks Spanish fluently is an irreplaceable asset. I could not even begin to do this otherwise. She brings a lilt and cheerfulness to every conversation with the people on the towns, the other peregrinos, the taxi drivers, etc. She also possesses a deep capacity for discussion on any number of topics, and shies away from few issues. I can see that the person one hikes with must be a person that you can "take" for an extended period of time. This person with whom I am hiking, is patient and giving—we each have our need of space and so while hiking there are times of quiet. This is OK. There does not need to be constant chatter. But chatter, I do, and chatter she does, some hours. This "hiking partner" thing is also a unique opportunity to hear what the person is really about. Susanna is a story teller. Walking for hours and days together, especially in a foreign country, exudes a

realness that is unusual. Again, we are so often on trial it feels to me, with most people. We like to think that we are not. But we are. (Facebook has not helped in this regard). The hiking partner quickly learns your weaknesses, your areas of interest and your capacities. And it is best if they accept them.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 1 Comment June 15, 2018 1 Minute Edit "Day 13"

Day 15



British teenagers in Spain for camp

We walked into Logrono Spain today about noon. This is a fairly large city and has a historic charm. From here, the Camino goes up. I am not looking forward to consistently "up" hiking, although I have discovered that "up" beats steep "down". We are inching along...

3) God. This is the third aspect of such an experience and with hours of quiet to deal with, I think about Him lots. I have not had some richly

stunning encounter yet and actually do not expect to. The mysticism of the Catholics on this trail eludes me. Rather, just having lots of time to pray, meditate on the Word, think. These are good assets and I hope my congregation back home can find joy in my having these at least, if I do not return with some glowing revelation. I am reading and I have completed one book, and have begun another; this trip is now three weeks old. Each book has meaningful spiritual value to me. And each has fed me while on this pilgrimage. But here's one thing I see—in the old churches, most of which are at 700 to 800 years old, I wonder what their builders' mindsets were? Each town has its own massive and centralized place of worship. In several ways they are all the same. But most are scantily attended these days, so it seems and so we are told. But when they were constructed, what were the thoughts of God? I daresay most churches with which I have been and are affiliated will probably not last 200 years. We build for pragmatism, function and simplicity. We seem to worship those priorities. The Spanish of 800 years ago valued high majesty and dramatic overwhelm in their church architecture. Yesterday's ruin in Viana, 12th century originally, whispers of a time when the worship of God—THE God—dominated the skyline. You can see it for miles from any direction. (It was demolished in 1844 after a time of war—I was saddened to learn that.). God, were you around then? God, were you pleased when these cathedrals were lifted up? God, did you, as the Word says, hear the prayers of believers through the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit? Or... were these empty caverns, filled with ritual only? I am also impressed as I said at the beginning of this blog with how utterly irrelevant Protestantism is here. It is so young, mainly Northern European and American (from these folks' perspective). And it is almost non-existent here. This forces me to see the faith a

little beyond my own faith-community-boundaries. Not theologically. Just socially. But Wherever God is on the Camino, the evidential tracks of His followers remain all over the place.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 2 Comments June 18, 2018 2 Minutes

Day 20



Today I am taking a "zero" day, and resting, blogging, reading, drinking coffee as Susanna does a side-excursion 12 miles south, to a 6th century site of an ancient monastery. Since monasticism itself is not much older than that, the site must be one of the earliest places for early Christian asceticism. She will take a bus back her to Najera and we will launch out again tomorrow morning, west. To me, Najera is a sort of Shangri La, nestled below an Arizona-looking side of mountain, split by a fine, gurgling

river. The locals look like they've never been anywhere else and have no need to go there. Last evening, because Susanna found them, we had dinner with a retired California couple, and a young German couple (26 and 20). The California couple bought dinner for all of us, and said it was their "Camino gift" to us. That was very kind—paella and Spanish lasagna. The German couple charmed us though. "Jan" and "Julia" are from Cologne and their English was excellent. [We learned that the German young-person's word for "cool" is "guel" and also perhaps, alternately, "stag" (pronounced *schtagg*). Since there was much talk of Russians, I learned that the word "Russki" is a WWII word used by Germans then, and most-def not now.] We were charmed by Jan and Julia who will make their first attempt at *night-hiking* with headlamps tonight.

I am reading in Luke, reading Gregory Thornbury's *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?* (2018) about Larry Norman, but as much about American evangelicalism in the 70s and 80s, and watching Ken Burns/Laura Novick's *The War* at night. (All albergues have WiFi, in varying quality). I recommend this series to all.

As for sleep, I have learned that I cannot sleep in a room with random other people in bunks, crammed in like a submarine (and yes, wise guys, I *have* been on two old submarines: Fall River and Charleston). I just can't sleep. Such rooming is cheaper for sure (7 to 10 euros/night), but sleep (it seems) is important. So I am going with the more moneyed individual rooms in the albergues (20-25 euros/night), or if not available, sharing a room with Susanna. Twice, we have stayed in hotels at 55 to 59 euros per night. Pure luxury! She prefers the bunk room deal, and loves to chat with various random internationals deep into the night. I also am *not*

down with unisex bathrooms, where like, I come out of the can to find a young woman at the mirror in her underwear, shaving her armpits: "Hola, amigo." Nope. Just not progressive, am I. Sorry.

My neck continues to bother me, as does my left leg where when walking I get a weird tingly pain across my upper femur area. I have never in my life felt this particular pain before. I know—quit whining and keep walking.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 1 Comment June 21, 2018 2 MinutesEdit"Day 20"

Day 22



Yesterday, into Alzofra, only 3.7 miles but I grew sick to my stomach all during the morning walk until

we arrived in town—my fault. I ate a complete serving of Spanish lasagna the previous evening. I know better, but I was pretty hungry. The first hill out of town looked like Curahee. My USMA friends, Steve, George and Kerry will understand that, should any of them see this. In the afternoon, Susanna enjoyed a side-walk, a mile or so and back, over to a lovely botanical garden where she was invited to walk through barefoot! (There was also an American young couple, honeymooning in a cottage, in the garden.) Today in Santo Domingo de la Calzada, at the Cistercian Sisters Hospederia. This town dates to the 11th century—same time as the Norman Invasion in England and the Battle of Hastings. There is, of course, no English history here, and England and Spain would not collide, principally, for another 400 years! This town is about Saint Dominic (Domingo Garcia, 1019 - 1109) who built a church (in which he is buried), a hospital and a highway, as an alternative to the old Roman road, for very early pilgrims on the Camino. Today he is looked to here as the patron saint of Spanish civil engineers! He had applied to the Benedictines for admission as a monk but was rejected. So he carved a different path of service.

Walking—slowly—I get a bit of a new perspective on places in the Gospels where we read “And Jesus went there with His disciples...” They walked; they always walked. It took time. It was probably hot. Water was precious (thus, John 4). There were no internet, maps and no iPhones. They just walked and encountered whatever was next, from town to town. Galilee, down south, over to the coast. For three years His disciples followed him around—on foot. One looks forward and sees the next town a couple miles off; then later, one looking back at that town a mile or so to the rear. I get exhausted just realizing this. Where’s my Ridgeline?

The weather this week has been lovely.

Day 25



2nd day in Burgos. Have been weirdly sick; Susanna exempting me from hiking since day 22. But barely enough stamina to do three walks (2 mi.each) over to the Burgos Cathedral, and do the tour today. This brief hiatus is not Camino-driven but it is a rare opportunity to explore and ponder the spirituality of 13th and 14th century churchmen. It is a monster of a building and I was exhausted after walking through—alone—and viewing the expansive spaces, the artwork, the ridiculous amounts of gold, the endless list of to-me-meaningless Spanish bishops etc. who are buried within, the commercialism which permeates the area seems predatory. But it is perhaps prematurely and crassly dismissive to be judgmental too quickly. I

also learn that El Cid is buried here, and that Francisco Franco headquartered himself here until 1938—there's lots of *other* history intertwined with that of the Church. Am learning something of the Spanish people, too.

Finished the Larry Norman book, and almost finished now with Linda Ronstadt's autobiography—why am I not reading Andy Stanley's or Francis Chan's latest book? Dunno. Not interested at the moment. Am reading Luke though. Also finished viewing (late at night) Ken Burns' *The War* (for the second time) and am now watching *The 100*. Today, Susanna tangled with a young Italian pediatric surgeon who did not appreciate her dismissal of fascism. Smash the state yo, but watch where you step, my little girl! Thank you for prayers, those praying. I appreciate it.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 2 Comments June 26, 2018 1 MinuteEdit"Day 25"

Day 28



Today is the 29th of June and my parents were married today by the Rev. Ralph Tabor, 72 years ago at Luther Place Memorial Church, in Washington D.C. I am in Astorga, Spain (pop.12,000)—a country to which neither of my parents ever visited. Dad would have

known something of this country—Franco, the Roman and Visigoth pre-cursors to Spanish medieval history, Hemingway's history here (I think Ernest Hemingway was Dad's favorite author and Hemingway loved Pamplona). I think Mom would have loved this culture. The Spanish are unpretentious and pretty "up front" with everything—she would have related to that. Stealth, subterfuge, deception, these were things my Dad studied but with which my Mom would have had no patience. The Spanish seem straight-forward, direct and quick-talkers. She would have liked that. She also would have loved the fresh air! She craved fresh air and slept with the windows open whenever possible. Here, even high up in high-rise hotel rooms you can open a window to nothing but fresh air. No screens even. As to the foundation-level Catholicism, the Mary adoration, etc. my parents would have no use for any of that. They would respect the age of the religion and the sincerity of the Spanish people but as to the mysticism of the Camino, the over-arching dominance of the big churches in every town, the gaudy gold and opulence, the reverence for bishops and cardinals, Dad or Mom would each decisively decline. As they married that last Saturday morning in June in Washington, the echoes of the War still rumbling, they were alone. No family members from either side were present. Dad was 31 and Mom was 22. A maid-of-honor (I do not remember her name—perhaps Lucy?) and a best man (John Hopkins who was Dad's best and life-long friend, and present at Dad's funeral in 1994) were all that attended. Mom did what small decorating of the church could be done, by herself, earlier that morning. Mr. Hopkins also doubled as wedding photographer but forgot to remove the lens cover from his camera, a life-long joke between them. Thus, there are only a couple of wedding pictures! They married as Lutherans, and drove off to Virginia Beach for their honeymoon. I have a few pictures of that idyllic time for

them. Dad had endured the War, returned home to his sweetheart. Mom had grown up—since '42 alone in D.C. but for her friends, her bosses (which included William S. Paley) her beauty and her drive. She married *out* of the Tennessee culture from which (she would say) she escaped. Dad's Lutheranism barely survived the War but it would sustain them through the 1950s. They would make their lives in D.C., first in Auburn Gardens in Alexandria and then from 1950 until 1990 at 4003 Ride Road in Annandale after which they moved to Dad's dream-location: St. Petersburg, where he had lived when 13 and 14. He had always wanted to return there. In 1989 he asked me to take Mom there to "look around" and try, "if practicable" (as R.E. Lee would have said) to convince her to move there with him. She needed little persuading. He had his last four years there, and Mom her last seven.

I am in *Hostal Caruna* for 24 hours, in Astorga, Spain. It is very 1950s. This afternoon, Susanna will arrive and tomorrow we will head west together again, toward Sarria and then to Santiago. Dad and Mom would each be very proud of Susanna (as also of their other granddaughter, Jocelyn). But Susanna is the adventurer of my Dad, the in-your-face and independent person of my Mom. She is a Messiah College and Yale Graduate School of Public Health alumna, an R.N. with RNC-OB certification. She amazes me with her ability to adapt, improvise and overcome—I would almost think she was a U.S. Marine. (She would have been an *excellent* Marine!) I wish she could have known my parents better and longer—she would bring them joy. It is a privilege to hike with her though my own stamina is fading.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment June 29, 2018 3 Minutes

Day 30 1 July 2018 The Lord's Day



Susanna is on the bus back to Astorga to pick up a few more Camino miles coming back this way before arriving here again tomorrow night. I am in Ponferrada awaiting her return—in a city of 69,000 famous though for its castle and medieval history as a center of the Knights Templar and the Crusades. The castle here, to which we walked this morning (on the Camino) dates to 1178. It is impressive and Susanna gave it a brief tour. I sat out front and watched re-enactors arrive for work. I did 2.4 miles this morning,

Again I am alone with myself and the Lord. (I think He at least, understands English.) This trip has brought me into an experience of aloneness in which I have never had to fathom. My mind goes to that picture still in my old office at DBC given to me in

2000 by Englishman Stuart Tanner (*Christ in the Desert*, 1873, by Ivan Kramskoi)– of Jesus sitting, alone, in the wilderness and looking quite forlorn. I do not like being alone and yet, here is the place where He meets me. The noise and the distraction of relationships mute His voice sometimes. And it is not as if being alone is an automatic thing by which we can hear better. In fact, there is nothing automatic about walking with God by faith. But alone I am better postured to pay attention. At least a little bit. And it does occur to me that the point of this sabbatical/pilgrimage in part was to *get away and be alone*. I have never however in my whole life experienced solitariness as I am in these weeks. May the Lord show up..

Two weeks from today we are scheduled to fly to Paris, then back West the next day, Susanna to Calgary, Alberta and me home. Between now and then we will make our way to Sarria, test my leg again and on to Santiago to finish at least Susanna's *compostela* (certificate of completion). Today, here I am in Ponferrada, among the hills where the Knights Templar hung out. Their castle still has its stories, their armor and their legends. Their town still proudly celebrates their gallantry.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment July 1, 2018 1 Minute

Day 33 and July 4th back home



My first July 4th in another country. (Spain celebrates many things but America's independence from England isn't one of them). I am in Sarria, in a hostel. This is the town considered by many to be the beginning of the final stretch of the Camino, 70 miles, ending in Santiago de Compostela. We rode the train from Ponferrada yesterday and Susanna took it back again early this morning. She will hike back here alone and arrive Friday night or Saturday morning. Why am I not with her? On this trip I have developed a random left-leg pain which now flares up unexpectedly. Some kind of nerve injury. It makes my upper thigh feel like its on fire and I can hardly stand, let alone walk. Then it goes away. I have no idea where this came from and have never before felt

this kind of debilitating affliction. So, I wait. When Susanna returns I will give it a try again—up the path on the first few miles of the final seventy. We shall see. She has endured greatly with me on this trip, accommodating, caring for, nursing. I appreciate her greatly.

It was providential that last evening, alone again, that I discovered an old friend from my youth on Messenger. Jeff (from San Francisco, who taught me how to play guitar by the way) is in Barcelona with wife and one of his sons. We had a nice chat via Messenger, and it cheered me greatly. God provides, so often, from unexpected sources. Without my iPad and iPhone on this trip I would have gone nuts. There is WiFi (pronounced "weefee" in this country) in every albergue and hostel and charging stations everywhere. But as I imagine most earlier pilgrims doing this trail—for a thousand years now—I can hardly estimate the depth of their loneliness on this trail across northern Spain. They were all driven by the belief that in finally arriving near to the alleged site of the apostle James' grave they would be would warmed and powerfully inspired. They sought "visitations" from God along the way. In fact *even now* you must profess a spiritual pursuit in order to be awarded the "compostela" (certificate) at trail's end in addition to completing the final-seventy on foot and acquiring 2 "stamps" per day for verification. (The Catholic Church doesn't mess around). Now on Day 33, I expect no such special visitation and I am pondering long and uninterrupted, the differences between the Catholic faith and my own stripped-down, clean Protestant faith. Yesterday, on the train, I listened to Lewis Johnson do an exposition of Romans 8:12-17—I have his Romans 8 messages (from the late 70s or early 80s) on my iPhone. It was startling to me to see how easy it is for us to preach, teach and do church in America. We

have all the accommodations. Away from there, and in this place though, where there are NO Protestants, it makes my unfiltered dependence on the Scripture much louder. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry out Abba, Father" (KJV, as Dr. Johnson was expounding the passage). That is my verse for today. It was not written by an American. It was not originally written in English. It was not endorsed by councils and denominations and publishing houses and it was not streamed into the public by Christian radio. It's just a truth, among many penned by Paul—whose grave location, by the way, we have no coordinates for. His bones offer me no buzz.

There is a rooster across the street this morning who won't shut up—it is completely quiet in this building and I can hear him through the walls. I remember there is also one near DBC in Dartmouth whom I often hear in the morning. Spain and Massachusetts are also not so different. People here in Sarria—most of whom appear to have never lived anywhere else—remind me some of people in Dartmouth, also life-long residents. They all are created by God, they all need the Gospel and they all possess the internal potential to walk by faith.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 2 Comments July 4, 2018 3 MinutesEdit"Day 33 and July 4th back home"

Day 34

Photo # NH 97444 USS Rendova departing San Diego, California, January 1954



Second full day alone in Sarria. What a weird experience this is. I am reading, going out and up the hill for breakfast, and just now, coffee. The proprietor of Menon O Tapas, the smokey and very popular bar and grill across the sidewalk from the town hall, has come to recognize me now. He patted me on the back this morning. Why is that so odd?

Since I can't walk much yet (except up the hill), I feel like a prisoner. I have the whole lovely second floor of "Mateus Rooms" to myself—three bedrooms, kitchen, living room and bathroom for something like 30 euros/day. Susanna prefers the community of just a bunk with many others, in a bunk room. For the first day I kept expecting someone else to come in and occupy the other bedrooms but so far I am completely

by myself. Strange. And I am not a prisoner of course, except to my own weakness. I do not speak Spanish and so that isolates me despite the locals' friendliness, and the ever-present passing through of many hikers. But I am so alien to this town, which looks like a little chunk of Brooklyn transported intact into the middle of the Spanish mountain frontier. As it turns out this is not an old town, but one which is relatively new: late 1800s. Did any of you ever spend three days alone in a town where you do not speak the language, and with no duties or responsibilities? And so I am quiet... And I read and think.

As I think of today's date of this day #34 I remember it would have been Renée's Dad's 93rd birthday. He would have been out on the lake in Virginia, sailing. I miss him still. He passed away in 1985. He was a Wisconsin native, as was my own father. In fact, they grew up only 200 miles from each other, though separated by 10 years. The war took each out of Wisconsin permanently (and to their lifeline sweethearts too). My Dad went Army, for whom he worked the rest of his life until retirement. Renée's Dad went Navy, became a pilot and worked a full career for the Navy until his retirement. (He flew off four carriers, though I seem to be the only one in the whole family who remembers such detail—WHICH included USS Badoeng Strait, which was featured in *Magnum Force*, Clint Eastwood, 1973). But I honor them both and miss them each greatly. I wonder what they would think of this strange, altered-pilgrimage I am on?

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 1 Comment July 5, 2018 2 MinutesEdit"Day 34"

Day 37 (the sixth Lord's Day)



When I awoke this morning in Melide at 5 am, it was dark and quiet. The fragrance wafting in my open window was sweet and fresh. As I turned on my iPad it emitted a three-tone b-b-beep. A dog perhaps a quarter of a mile away started barking at my "beeps"—that's how quiet it was. I could get used to quiet...

So far in my life I have visited Haiti, Northern Ireland (saddest place I have visited), England, France, Italy, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Israel and the Bahamas (they don't really count as a foreign country, do they?) and now Spain. I wonder what place Spain will have in the Kingdom of Christ when He returns? Did I startle you? Yes, I do believe He will return: He said He would, plainly; angels said He

would and all the apostles said He would. And the apostle James, whose alleged bones I will visit in six days, would have enthusiastically agreed. All biblical contributors were in agreement. In teaching His small gang of followers about prayer, He said (in part) to pray *Thy kingdom come*.. The Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodoxy say little about this—it is Protestants who exegete the Bible and easily observe this teaching. (Liberal Protestants of course, for the last 200 years, have little-to-no interest in eschatology except as it can be adapted to environmentalism or racial reconciliation or themes of some kind of universalistic homogenization). Taken for what it says though, the Bible points unapologetically to a time when Jesus actually comes back to Planet Earth and infuses a Kingdom of which He is the King. It is not an interpretation. It is just honest exegesis. This is not only overwhelmingly laid out in the Book of Revelation but in every Gospel and all through the epistles. It is also pretty clear as a far-seen reality in the writings of Israel's prophets. So, I am wondering, what place will Spain have in the Kingdom to come?

It is a lovely Sunday morning in Melide, a town of which I had not heard until two days ago. 6,000 residents. As I sit in the coffee shop of the "hotel" people are coming in for breakfast, coffee and a relaxed time together. They do not appear to be heading to or from mass today—they're relaxed, happy and peaceful by appearance at least. I hear no English of course, but they give no evidence of any concerns at all. Last evening though, in the same coffee shop ("Mama", the proprietor, gave me a coffee and chunks of croissant at no charge) I was approached by four fine looking Spanish teenaged boys. They invited me to a special mass in honor of St. Somebody, the patron saint of truckers. There

were fireworks and festivities all over town last night and they said a priest would be there, blessing all "lorries" and 18-wheelers and they invited me to attend. (I did not attend but I thought that was touching—I either a) looked like a trucker or b) gave appearance of needing to go to church.) I thanked them for the invitation and they enthusiastically moved on saying, "we're just looking for people to invite!" The Spanish are friendly and warm. Like the inherent quiet of this countryside, one could get used to this relaxed friendliness.

From what we read in the Bible the coming Kingdom of Christ will not be racially or nationally boundaried. It will not be a coalition or an alliance. It will be one kingdom, with one King: an absolute and Beloved Monarchy. All the charms and wonder of the British Royalty (sans the Irish), will pale in comparison. But that doesn't mean that all its subjects—*from every tribe, tongue and nation*—will all be Borgified drones. I think there will still be some kind of lovely distinctiveness. My art professor friend back in Dartmouth, Tony, says "if you want engineering, go to the Germans. If you want flavor, to the French. If you want design, go to the Italians." In the kingdom, I think the Spanish influx, from this world, will bring warmth. They will love the King no less than any of His redeemed. And we will all lose our stupid false beliefs, our misconceptions, our prejudices, our unlearning, our self-destructive stubbornness, our errors and all our sins will have been nailed to the cross at Calvary. But to the Spanish part of the Bride, I think, in that day when His kingdom is inaugurated, we will look for and find a warmth by which, and in which we will better serve the King.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment July 8, 2018 3 MinutesEdit"Day 37 (the sixth Lord's Day)"

Day 38



Thinking about those bones, again... If the bones of James-the-apostle are really there in Santiago de Compostela, what does that mean? James (another James) wrote "for you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Early in this pilgrimage at Zabldika, I asked a Sister if she believed that the church building in which she worked—the one where they invited me to climb the tower and ring the ancient bell—was a sacred space? She struggled to understand me in English but then said, "I believe that the outsides are sacred, that nature is sacred. This is an old building and I love it but it is not so sacred to me as the outsides." That stunned me. The whole notion of the ancient church buildings that we have visited here in Spain, sometimes ruins, and across the northern stretch—is that these spaces are sacred, "sanctified" by various old relics and artifacts. Supposedly these artifacts provide evidence to the truth of the apostles' doctrines, for the people to cling to. That Sister was not in need of relics, she implied. The "outsides" and their beauty are all the *testimony* she needs as to the Creator (or at least that was how I

took her meaning). I don't know: maybe she just took me to be a smart-alecky American Protestant (which of course, I am). But my question was sincere, and her answer was sincere. For that brief encounter, I loved that old Sister.

It seems to me that as cool as old things are (nobody loves history more than me), they possess the strong potential to distract us from the real meaning of faith in God. Faith, by definition, is "incorporeal" and it seeks and strains to "see" the *invisible* promises of God. Many of my friends today have none. Abraham lived on faith, with only a few verifications—he was *looking forward, to the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God*. We also wait. As James (another one) said, "You also be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand." His faith was not bolstered by the bones of Jacob, David or Isaiah. In fact, his faith was energized by the eye-witness fact that Jesus was still wearing His bones, after having been crucified and buried. He wears them still.

I'm not at all sure that James even *went* to Spain (we do know that Paul at least, intended to make it there). And if James' two disciples dragged his corpse across Europe (as the ninth century legend says) after he was martyred back in Judea in AD 44, and buried it in what we now call Santiago then so be it. But that devotion of those disciples is not what I am thinking about. I am thinking about the sure promises of the apostles' writings: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, Jude and James. These six weeks punctuate 40 years of having staked everything, professionally, in those promises: their veracity, reliability and hope.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment July 9, 2018 2 Minutes Edit "Day 38"

Day 39



From Melide to Salceda, which is 15 miles from the Cathedral and City of Santiago de Compostela. I walked a wee bit today and Susanna bussed back to Melide and will get into town here tonight. The albergues, hostels and "pension" hostels have mostly been adequate-to-wonderful overnight lodgings. We find that in being old Spanish they often are beat up and weathered on the outside and so there seems to be a compensating dynamic to make the insides lovely, depending on how much one is willing to spend. Certainly not to level myself with Paul, but I am reminded at least of his words "I have learned in whatever circumstances I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound." My Mom once told me she did not like the apostle Paul. "Why not, Mom?" I asked. "He's too pious." I harrumphed at her but had to go look up the word "pious" at that point. The man with the resume of suffering was certainly not over-pious. Pity, Mom, that you think that. But these six and a half weeks have reminded me—at least, if nothing else—of the

high value of somehow finding contentment. I have a long way to go.

In the animal department, as I sit in Casa Tia Teresa, and get to know Teresa and Monola (husband) a little, the old proprietors who minister coffee, soup, etc. to thousands of peregrinos (pilgrims) a lovely black dog meandered into the cafe. He immediately went to an Asian young woman seated and having soup and jumped up to her lap. She was stunned but laughed. Teresa asked me (in Spanish) "is he yours?" Asian girl said no. I obtained my coffee and went outside to the umbrella-ed terrace to sit and blog. Dog came to me, next—took a relaxed place under my table! Friendliest dog I ever met. Teresa asked me again if he were mine? I said No. He was petitioning for a handout, I think. Monola came out then with a pail of water for him, then some bacon, which he happily received. I said, "Let's call him 'Bandito', Teresa and Monola chuckled and said, "Si, Si, Bandito."

Leg better; neck better. Walked a bit, as I say. Then leg flared up again for a time, just as we arrived in Salceda. Time to read, think.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment July 10, 2018 2 MinutesEdit"Day 39"

Day 40



We arrived in O Pontillon this morning, six miles from Santiago. I note a row of nine flags out front of this very 1960s hotel. The furthest one east is the American flag, the first I have seen since May 29th in Boston. There are many peregrinos now, all approaching the end of their pilgrimages. (Chatting with one older Canadian man this morning, for whom this is his 10th Camino walk, he was dark and cynical about the plight of western culture—just that he spoke English and approached me was surprising). As I read John Brierly's book about the Camino—he is an author who promotes business sabbaticals and pilgrimages as a way to reassess life's purpose—and we have been through two copies of his Camino book, I have taken seriously his admonitions to *reflect* on this trip. He writes without much religious predisposition or agenda. I am remembering similar walks and treks I have taken in the past, though none so long. And I was much younger: walking with life-friends Sandy & Jan Lu through many places in Israel (Capernaum, Magdala, Qumran, Masada, the Temple Mount, Caesarea Philippi, etc.); exploring unchanged

Groove Park from my youth with daughter Jocelyn and life-friend Linda Eardley, walking around the downtown business district of Belfast with Stuart Tanner (assistant at that time to Ian Pailsey, MP); padding in the rain with Caroline Louis through Hastings, England and down to the Channel; walking sadly (me, not them) with Edwin Menon and Willio Destin down the dusty road outside of Grand Guoave, Haiti and then with Willio down the beach at sunrise; walking slowly and carefully around Buchenwald concentration camp with daughter Jocelyn and son-in-law Aaron; striding across the field toward the Hauptbahnhof Deutsche Bahn station, in front of the Reichstag in Berlin... None of these were sabbaticals nor long walks but all were times in which I was given the opportunity to reflect. None were religiously fueled—well, perhaps Israel was—but in each I was deeply aware of God's presence. I remain of this conclusion—This world is broken, in my humble opinion. That is a simple thought. Without respect even to my specific theology, it is just observation. Things are far more broken than simply ethnically, educationally, economically or environmentally. Things remain deeply broken, spiritually. Here in Spain, that sense of ruination is muted, I judge—at least in northern Spain where life is slower and almost timeless. (I cannot speak for Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia or Seville—more cosmopolitan and exciting I am sure). I am not less convinced of this, having enjoyed the Spanish warmth and friendliness. If the Basque Country and Galicia are more like the Shire, that may be so. But the time here to think about the deep history of the church, to feel the ruins of churches, the plain needs of all the people as those boys who invited me to the special trucker mass testified, this world is not going to fix itself.

My mind went back to Pamplona yesterday where this weekend the running of the bulls occurred. The big news was that five young men were trampled by the bulls and one gored. What an apt illustration of what I am seeing here, spiritually. The Spanish make no apologies for their sport. The young men who run with the bulls take their chances and sometimes get broken. Hemingway was fascinated by it all, and then blew his own brains out. I am more deeply grateful for the Gospel that legend says took St. James (*Santiago*) to NW Spain to share it. I doubt the truth of that legend itself although if it is true then *bravo James*, but it is a signpost to the power of the good news. I love that good news—which is for all the nations, including the countries of the nine flags.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment July 11, 2018 3 Minutes Edit "Day 40"

Day 41



We walked into San Marcos, a burb of Santiago today. I did 3.1 miles but leg then acted up in pain. Sheesh. Susanna then walked into town and reconnoitered the city a bit. She brought me a *Bueno* bar too (excellent Spanish candy bar). We will have a good half-day more in Santiago. She is also now feverishly working on the permits for her next hikes too. This next one, in the Canadian Rockies, she will do alone for about six weeks.

There were many young pilgrims all around us today on the Camino. As we near the end and whatever conclusions we find, people grow quieter on the trail. Interesting. Do saints' bones make us quiet? Does the massive Cathedral yet to be seen make us quiet? Does the end of a phase of reflection

and pondering make us quiet? I am scheduled to return to New Bedford Monday night. Will I be quieter? We shall see...

I am grateful for the time to do this trip and my time with daughter Susanna.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized Leave a comment July 12, 2018 1 MinuteEdit "Day 41"

Day 43



Today, our last full day here we spent time in the Cathedral of St James. Like all, this building is massive. It's construction was between 1060 (6 years before the Norman invasion) and 1211 (4 years before Magna Carta). I know. I am an insufferable Anglophile. (None of this Spanish and Catholic heritage has anything to do with England but I tend to cross-reference everything with English history.) As we stood in a long line to walk by the

famous *statue* of James, inching along, I noticed a little side-entrance which said "Sepulchrum Sancti Iacobi". I said to Susanna, "let's go down here". And there, greatly understated I thought, was the silver bone box of the supposed relics of James, brother of the apostle John (as I noted previously, Catholic scholars call him "James the Greater"). As I waited for a couple of people to kneel and pray, about 8' away from the box, I took a couple of pictures and enjoyed the brief proximity. This is the end-goal of the whole pilgrimage, as it was originally practiced since the 10th century. I thought, "how ironic to want to adore the statue and yet walk past, and miss the tiny door to go down to the bones!" But hey, wudda I know for cool statues?

Susanna and I acquired our certificates of completion, the *Compostella*. That in itself was a pretty cool process. We flew to Paris, and then I flew home to Boston. Susanna flew to British Columbia to soon begin her next adventure.

I could not have done this pilgrimage without her. I was embarrassed at how weak and vulnerable I had become. She was out of patience with me and was glad to get on to Canada. Who could blame her? I was no heroic, noble Daddy by then. I was exhausted and as it turned out, septic with infection and had shed forty pounds in seven weeks. But I was glad she agreed to do this with me. Neither of us will ever forget it. Was God in it? I will have to ponder that for some time. In any event, He is good. All the time.

thedarknesswiththelight Uncategorized 5 Comments July 14, 2018 1 MinuteEdit "Day 43"