
I Am A Pilgrim

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

I was stronger way back in my backpacking days, maybe twenty years ago. For about ten years or so, I belonged to a group of buddies who made an annual summer trek somewhere out West, somewhere way off any trails, and somewhere as high as we could walk without ropes. It was thrilling and wonderful and sometimes dangerous. We took some risks, and we lived.

After most every trip, of about ten days each, we would find our way to some local watering hole, for remembrance and libation and general self-congratulation. Usually, there would be a band playing, and my buddies found it great entertainment to persuade the band to let me sit in with them for a song or two.

I was especially glad to oblige if there was a piano nearby. But often, there was no piano, and I would be happily forced to play guitar and sing. Well, I am no singer, and even less a guitarist; but I enjoy it. At every venue, I sang one particular song, a song I knew would be familiar in cowboy bars. It goes like this:

*I am a pilgrim and a stranger,
Just travelin' through this wearisome land.
But I've got a home in that yonder city, good Lord
And it's not (good Lordy it's not) not made by hand.
I got a mother, a sister and a brother
Who have gone to that sweet home
And I am determined to go and see them, good Lord
Over on (good Lordy over on) that distant shore.
As I go down to that river Jordan
Just to bathe my weary soul,
If I could touch but just the hem of His garment, good Lord
I believe (good Lordy I believe) that it would make me whole.
Now when I'm dead, laying in my coffin
All of my friends all gathered round
They can say that he's just laying there sleeping, good Lord
Sweet peace (Lordy sweet peace) his soul is found.*

That song, "I am a Pilgrim," was written by Merle Travis, but it has been performed ("covered" they say now) by everyone from Bill Monroe and Johnny Cash and Doc Watson to The Byrds and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. The lyrics I use are from Bill Monroe. I still love to sing it.

I love the song, because, at heart, I always seem to be on a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage, to me, is some specific journey toward holiness. A pilgrimage is a journey toward The Holy. This past summer, you read some excellent remarks on "pilgrimage"

from Dale Adelman, our Canon for Music, as he led our choir on a pilgrimage to England. They found holiness and delight there. Some of you read my own words about a pilgrimage to Ghana, a pilgrimage I took with Episcopal Relief and Development, the mission arm of The Episcopal Church.

It is my belief, however, that each of us is on a pilgrimage, even if we have never left our hometown. It is good to have some physical journey as a symbol of our pilgrimage; but we also do not need to travel anywhere physically at all. Every one of us is on a journey toward The Holy, whether we know it or not.

I pray that this church, the Cathedral of St. Philip, is a healthy part of your pilgrimage. I pray that this is a place where you find The Holy, even if you need to find The Holy over and over again.

For the next three weeks, I will devote "The Dean's Forum" to presentation and discussion about pilgrimage. I will present slides and descriptions of my own pilgrimage to Ghana on September 15 and 22. Canon Dale Adelman will review the choir's pilgrimage to England on September 29. Join us! And join the pilgrimage here. It is a great delight to journey together, to take risks, and to live!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip