

Walking the Cross Labyrinth

Pilgrimage: For Christians, pilgrimage is an ancient tradition dating back at least to the 4th century A.D. The earliest pilgrim journeys visited the Holy Land, going to the places where Christ Himself lived and walked and performed His earthly ministry. Pilgrims withdrew from their day to day lives. Leaving all of their worldly ambitions and concerns behind them, they visited places such as Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, Jerusalem, Calvary, and surrounding areas. They were driven by their sincere commitment to Christ, and by their thirst to deepen their faith. Their time was focused on their Lord. Their minds were focused on their Lord. Their hearts were focused on their Lord. When they arrived at their destination, they were prepared to encounter Christ in a new and special way. Everything that they had and everything that they did revolved so completely around their devotion to God that they could not help being changed. A pilgrimage was not complete, though, until the return journey. The return would retrace the journey back to its origin. Pilgrims returned to the same communities they had left, but they returned as changed people.

Labyrinth Pilgrimage: The labyrinth is used as a pilgrimage. Like the early pilgrimages, walking the labyrinth represents a journey. It is not a journey to the Holy Land, but it is a journey to a holy place. It is a journey that leaves day to day life behind. It is a journey that sets aside all ambitions and concerns. It is a journey to that place where God's people worship in spirit and in truth; a journey of sincere commitment to Christ; a journey to a deeper faith. Time in the labyrinth is focused on Christ. Minds are focused on Christ. Hearts are focused on Christ. The journey into the labyrinth prepares the pilgrim to encounter Christ in a new and special way—a life changing way. After communing with God, the pilgrim retraces the journey, returning to the same place, but returning as a changed person.

Walking the Labyrinth: A labyrinth is not a maze. It is a path. It has no wrong turns. It leads from the entrance to one place. In the Cross Labyrinth, that place is the foot of the cross.

On the path to the cross, remember that this is a journey. It is a pilgrimage. Breathe deeply and leave the ambitions and concerns of daily life behind. Walk with the expectation of encountering Christ. Open yourself to a deeper relationship. Focus this time on Christ. Focus your mind on Christ. Focus your heart on Christ.

As you walk, you might say a familiar prayer or a "breath prayer" silently, perhaps quietly aloud. You might turn your thoughts to the words of a hymn such as "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus," or "When I Survey

the Wondrous Cross." Feel the excitement welling up inside of you as the path leads you closer to the cross. Feel the yearning as the path takes you farther away. Think of the nails that pierced Christ as you walk past the hands and feet of the cross. Remember the spear that ripped through His side.

At the same time, consider where you are in relation to the cross—beside the cross, above the cross, beneath the cross—but never quite "at" the cross.

Finally the path will bring you to the foot of the cross. Pause there and reflect.

- For you, Christ came to earth.
- For you, Christ fulfilled prophecy.
- For you, Christ suffered on the cross.
- For you, Christ died.
- For you, Christ laid in the tomb.
- For you, Christ arose victorious.
- For you, Christ ascended.
- For you, Christ will return.

Remember the soldiers who cast lots for Jesus' garments. If you could, would you seek a chance to "win" His clothes? If Christ offered to clothe you, what garment would you take? What would it symbolize to you?

Take time to walk the perimeter of the cross. You are close enough to touch. If you are so moved, stoop down and touch it. Don't mark it. Let it mark you.

As you pass the first hand, consider your place next to Christ. Are you like one of the thieves? Which one? Consider yourself on his cross.

As you pass the head, consider the crown that Christ wore. Think about the sign that was posted. What sign would you put at the head of Jesus' cross?

As you pass the other hand, consider the other thief. Consider yourself on his cross. What would you say to Jesus?

As you are returning to the foot of the cross, consider the soldier who pierced Christ to the heart. He used his spear to make certain that Jesus was dead, but in doing so he encountered Christ in such a powerful way that he was compelled to confess that truly, Christ is the Son of God.

Take as much or as little time as you need to pray and meditate, or to simply sit in silence. Exit by retracing the path back to the entrance. Like the early pilgrims who traveled to Israel, return to the world you came from. The world will not be any different, but you will be. You will be.