

**Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

**Title: Travelers Vs. Pilgrims**

**Lesson: Psalm 84 NRSV**

<sup>1</sup> *How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!*

<sup>2</sup> *My soul longs, indeed it faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*

<sup>3</sup> *Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.*

<sup>4</sup> *Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise. Selah*

<sup>5</sup> *Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.<sup>[a]</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> *As they go through the valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.*

<sup>7</sup> *They go from strength to strength;  
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*

<sup>8</sup> *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*

<sup>9</sup> *Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed.*

<sup>10</sup> *For a day in your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.*

*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than live in the tents of wickedness.*

<sup>11</sup> *For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
he bestows favor and honor.*

*No good thing does the LORD withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.*

<sup>12</sup> *O LORD of hosts,  
happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

**(Slide 1)** Most people love to travel. Travel makes people excited. Travel is a way to escape from everyday life, and provides new experiences such as new places, new people, new cultures, and new activities. So, people get excited and have high expectations the day before they go on a trip. There is a word, pilgrimage that is similar to travel, but it is different. Do you know the difference? If travel provides anticipation of new things, pilgrimage makes people reflect on their relationship with God. On pilgrimage, people focus on God's love and grace. That is why people visit Santiago pilgrimage route, Israel pilgrimage, etc. Travelers may complain and be annoyed if their trip doesn't go as planned. However, the pilgrims accept with gratitude for the life God has given, and for all the events they encounter during their pilgrimage.

There are two main ways to live life: Life as a traveler and life as a pilgrim. Beloved, I would ask you, "Are you currently a traveler or a pilgrim in your life?"

I've learned that many Americans mostly go on trips in July-August. This is similar to Koreans. A few days ago, I was contacted by a pastor who studied together in Claremont, CA and is now serving Methodist churches in Kansas. He asked me, "Are you doing well in your ministry?" I answered, maybe? I hope so. And he said, "my church members have gone on a trip, and they don't intend to come back." He seemed to miss his church members very much.

**(Slide 2)** In this way, we feel longing through absence. When children live with their parents, they don't realize how precious those times are, but when they get married and leave their parents, they begin to miss the time they spent with them. People sometimes miss the place they were born and raised, sometimes they miss their childhood friends, sometimes they miss their spouse, sometimes they miss their youngest and most beautiful days, and sometimes they miss their big business successes. When I was in California, I longed for winter and snow so much. I also like warm knits, coats, and long-sleeved shirts, which are difficult to wear in California's hot weather. However, by the grace of the Lord, my family and I came to Wisconsin and were able to enjoy the last fall and the snow in the winter. Korea gets less snow than Wisconsin, so White Christmas is special in Korea. However, snow is common in Wisconsin. I've learned a Wisconsin joke: A man was looking out the window in winter, it was snowing and he shoveled, shoveled, and shoveled the snow. He cleared the snow, he was going to rest, but it snowed again so he shoveled, shoveled, and shoveled the snow again. And he thought he had cleared

the snow, so he tried to rest, but it snowed again, and he shoveled, shoveled, and shoveled the snow again.

I usually miss summer in winter, and I usually miss winter in summer. Likewise, most people miss something.

**(Slide 3)** The poet, who wrote today's words, was on a pilgrimage, and was longing for the Lord's courtyards: "My very being longs, even yearns, for the LORD's courtyards. My heart and my body will rejoice out loud to the living God!" (2) In fact, God is not only in the courtyards but outside, and He is everywhere, not just inside the church. Even though God is everywhere, he was longing for God's courtyards because he was feeling psychologically and physically far from God. It seems that his life was hard. We often compare the dark and difficult periods of life to a wilderness. His life was like wilderness that always needs God's help. The days are hot in the wilderness, and the nights are cold. It's hard to get food and water there. There are also snakes and scorpions. So, it's hard to plan something or guarantee about the future. However, even though his life was hard, he decided to sing a song of joy to God rather than complaining and blaming. Even in the midst of hard life, in the midst of uncertainty, he praises God, the only certainty.

**(Slide 4)** In verses 5-6 he says: "Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baca they make it as place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools." On his pilgrimage, he gains strength from the Lord and moves toward God.

**(Slide 5)** In Genesis (Genesis 16-21), there is a woman named Hagar. She was Sarah's slave. Her master had long been childless with Abraham. So, Sarah told Abraham to lie with Hagar and have a child. So, Abraham and Hagar had a child named Ishmael. About 14 years passed, and God also gave Abraham and Sarah a child named Isaac. He was the son of Abraham when his father was 100 and Sarah at the age of 90. However, she witnessed her precious son being teased by Hagar and Ishmael. This made her very angry, and she demands that Abraham expel them. Abraham was troubled, but he sent them out into the wilderness because God has promised them protection. Hagar and her son were lost in the desert. Even her only skin of water she had had run out. She was frustrated and felt completely helpless. Feeling the complexity and misery of her life, she sat in her seat and cried out. Her situation resonated with me personally raising my son. Then her God heard her crying, and sent an angel to calm her down. And He promised to protect them, and opened Hagar's eyes. When she stopped crying, she saw a well of water.

**(Slide 6)** You may know Oprah Winfrey. She is very famous and is best known for her talk show, “The Oprah Winfrey Show.” Today, she is splendid, wealthy, and famous, but her birth and childhood was not. According to Wikipedia, she was born into poverty to a single teenage mother and was abused during her childhood and became pregnant at 14, but lost her son soon. But, she didn’t lose hope and said that she leaned about gratitude while being a long time Christian and having been raised in the Baptist church, and began applying it to her own life. She said that “That’s when the gratitude practice became really strong for me, because it’s hard to remain sad if you’re focused on what you have instead of what you don’t have.” She said she was able to get through the tough times by practicing gratitude to God.

God is always with us. He always wants to give us strength. The themes of the Vacation Bible School 2021 were ‘When life is unfair, God is good’; ‘When life is scary, God is good’; ‘When life changes, God is good’; ‘When life is sad, God is good’

Beloved, even when our lives are unfair God loves us; even when our lives are scary, God loves us; even when our lives change, God loves us; even when our lives are sad, God loves us.

God hears our prayers, is our shield, and gives us strength to overcome all difficulties we encounter. In fact, every journey of our lives is a journey of pilgrimage. We come from God and we return to God. There are two attitudes walking on this journey of life: the attitude of a traveler and the attitude of a pilgrim.

Travelers buy good camping tools, a new RV trailer, book a luxurious hotel room to enjoy their travel, but they are disappointed if they do not meet their expectations. However, the pilgrims thank God for the life and embrace every situation they face by trusting God.

**(Slide 7)** I would like to end today’s message with this question: “Are you travelers on the journey of life? Or are you pilgrims?”