20261004 Reflection on the Pilgrimage (7 April 2026-14 May 2026)

Pilgrimage for Rediscovering Discipleship

Mark 6:7–13

Illumination Prayer — Matthew 16:24

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Lord Jesus Christ, as we reflect on your call to discipleship, open our hearts to hear again your words: "Follow me." Help us to recognise what we need to leave behind, what we need to carry, and where we need to trust you. May your Spirit illuminate our journey of discipleship. Amen.

In Mark 6:7–13, Jesus sends the Twelve out, two by two. He gives them authority, but not many resources. They are told to travel lightly and depend on God, one another and the hospitality of those they meet. This simple sending became an important image for my 2026 study leave. My central question was:

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus in this fast-changing world?

As part of my study leave, I walked the Camino de Santiago from 7 April to 14 May 2026. The Camino is obviously very different from the journey of Jesus' first disciples. Yet walking for many weeks, carrying only what I needed, leaving familiar routines, meeting people along the way and depending on what each day brought gave me a space to reflect on discipleship in a very physical way.

When Jesus first called his disciples, he simply said, **"Follow me."** Simon Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed him. James and John left their boat and their father and followed him.[1] Discipleship began with movement: leaving something behind and trusting the one who calls.

Mark 6 takes that movement further. Jesus sends his disciples beyond the security of the familiar. They travel lightly, depend on others and discover that they are not sent alone.

Matthew 16:24 helped me to see this journey more deeply: **"Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me."** For me, self-denial is not self-rejection. It is the willingness to loosen my grip on the securities, habits and assumptions that can keep me from following Christ.

The Camino therefore became more than a long-distance walk. It became a place to pause, listen and ask again what discipleship means for me and for the ministry entrusted to me.

Five movements emerged from this journey: **setting out, moving, connecting, reassessing and rediscovering**. Through them, I reflect not on how I completed a pilgrimage, but on how the pilgrimage invited me to rediscover what it means to follow Jesus.

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[1] Matthew 4:18–22.

Setting out –Leaving what is familiar

The Camino walk really began when I started gathering information from friends, YouTube videos, and books. Initially, it looked like a daunting idea to walk 20 – 25 kilometres a day. Although I love to walk, I'd never walked such a long distance. I watched many YouTube videos that advised people what to take and what not to take. Also, there were many things that made me concerned. During the walk, I would stay at hostels (aka Albergue), except on a few occasions, which made me feel uncertain too. I've never slept on a bunk bed with many strangers in the same room either, except on school trips when I was young. I wasn't sure whether I could find a bed at Albergue at the end of the day either. There were more serious issues too. As a vegetarian, I didn't know if I could find the right food all the way to Santiago. Also, I didn't speak French or Spanish either, and it made me nervous too, since my starting point was St Jean-Pied-de-Port in France, and the destination was Santiago de Compostela in Spain. On top of this, there were a few disruptions too on my itinerary. Initially, my flight was booked with Emirates Airlines. By mid-March, the war between Iran and the US was accelerating, and the Dubai airport was being bombed. In the end, I had to change my flights to Singapore Airlines. All these small and large changes meant letting go of what was familiar and learning to begin without having everything under my control.

The disciples' circumstances were very different from mine, yet the Gospel accounts suggest that following Jesus involved leaving familiar security, travelling from place to place, depending on others and accepting uncertainty. As read in Matthew 12:1-2, the hungry disciples began picking heads of grain to eat when they walked through the grainfields on the Sabbath. We may ask ourselves – have we left everything behind to follow Jesus? It may not necessarily be our houses or jobs – but are we still trying to remain the lord of our own lives?

2. Moving – Learning to travel lightly and let go of control

Discipleship also involves being sent out to deliver the good news of Jesus Christ. When sent out to villages to deliver the good news[1], Jesus instructed the disciples to travel light – taking no money, knapsack or extra sandals while relying on people's hospitality.

After research and advice from friends, I finally decided to take a 25-litre backpack in which I had to put everything I needed for several weeks. For several days before departure, I practised packing things. It was not easy to decide what to bring and what not to bring. I began to discover how many things I normally possessed which I didn't actually need.

Travelling lightly taught me about possessions; constant movement taught me about control. Carrying a 25-litre backpack weighing 6 -7 kg, including a water bottle on my back all the time, I couldn't think of adding anything more as it was already full and heavy enough. Jesus' instructions about travelling light were finally understood on a physical level.

In addition, the disciples were sent as workers in the harvest, while the working environment was like that of lambs in the midst of wolves.[2] In my pilgrimage, it was more about physical hardships, such as walking an average of 20-25 km per day and sleeping in a bunk bed while enduring noise and all kinds of inconvenience, including foreign languages and cultures. But the real hardship was more than that. It was more about losing control of your life – you are in constant motion, adapting to a new and different environment. In most cases, you are not in a position to control things as you wish, including a choice of a bunk bed, food if you are on a special diet – to name a few.

The experience also challenged my understanding of control. Much of ministry involves

[1] Matthew 10:5-15; Luke 9:1-6
[2] Matthew 10:16

planning, organising, and preparing. These things are necessary. Yet the Camino reminded me that growth often happens in situations beyond our control. Weather changes, plans change, people change, and sometimes the path itself changes. Discipleship requires trust in God's guidance even when the destination is not fully visible. The yellow arrows of the Camino became a simple reminder that, often enough, guidance is given for the next step rather than the entire journey.

3. Connecting –Discovering that the journey is never entirely individual

Discipleship also involves connecting with people through the good news. The Camino reminded me that people continue to search for meaning. Many pilgrims were not religious, yet they carried deep questions about purpose, identity, relationships, suffering, and the direction of their lives. Some were seeking healing. Others were processing grief, disappointment, or major life decisions. While the language of faith may no longer be familiar to many people, the deeper human questions remain unchanged.

This has implications for ministry. The church may not always need to provide answers immediately. Sometimes our role is to walk alongside people, listen carefully to their stories, and create space where questions can be explored honestly. On the Camino, meaningful conversations often emerged not because someone was preaching, but because people walked together. There is wisdom in that for ministry today.

Another lesson was the importance of community. Although many pilgrims began walking alone, they rarely remained isolated. People encouraged one another, shared information, looked after one another when injured, and celebrated each other's progress. The journey was personal, but it was never entirely individual. Christian discipleship is similar. Faith is personal, but it is lived in community. While the Camino reminded me of the human need for companionship, Christian discipleship goes further: we do not simply walk alongside one another; we walk together as people whose lives are directed towards Christ.

4. Reassessing – Discovering what is essential, physically and spiritually

The pilgrimage stripped life back to its essentials. Each day revolved around simple things: walking, finding shelter, eating, resting, and beginning again. There was little room for excess. Initially, I thought I would have plenty of time for reflection. It was wrong. I simply couldn’t think of anything except one step ahead of me. Especially when the destination was

still far away, the sun was really hot with no shade, and you had to take one step and then another no matter what. Thinking about anything else became a luxury, since there was no room to think about anything except shelter, water, snacks, and the map. Sometimes discipleship is not about having profound thoughts about God. Sometimes it is simply taking the next faithful step.

Even so, the constant walking itself became a kind of meditation and prayer. As I walked, I became more attentive to God and to the journey. At the end of each day, there was deep satisfaction simply in having completed the day's walk. Despite the physical fatigue, I experienced a quiet spiritual satisfaction in having taken the next step and reached the day's destination. I learned to let go of my need to control everything and to trust God's leading. Despite my strong sense of independence, I also learned how much I needed to rely on others. I depended on strangers for advice about dealing with blisters, finding the medicine I needed, locating water fountains, and finding my way when I lost the right direction. Through these ordinary encounters, I experienced the kindness of others as a gift from God. For all these people and all these experiences, I remain deeply thankful to God.

In addition, having less physically and mentally, I became more aware of what was truly important. This made me wonder whether we sometimes make discipleship more complicated than Jesus intended. Jesus sent his disciples out lightly equipped, dependent upon God and the hospitality of others. The focus was not on resources but on faithfulness.

5. Rediscovering Jesus' discipleship – Trusting God one step at a time

Finally, discipleship has a destination. The Camino has Santiago de Compostela as its destination; Christian discipleship looks towards the fulfilment of God's purposes, beautifully pictured in Revelation as the new creation and the New Jerusalem. What I have learned is to trust God one step at a time. Although I didn't know what was ahead, I trusted God for the day – such as my whole body, especially the knees and the feet, would endure the hardships of the long walk. Also, the Camino reinforced the importance of joy. The joy was not simply arriving at Santiago de Compostela. In many ways, arrival felt surprisingly ordinary. The deeper joy came from recognising God's faithfulness throughout the journey: in the people I met, the hospitality I received, the strength given for each day's walk, and the awareness that God had been present all along. In ministry, it can be tempting to measure success through

outcomes and achievements. The Camino reminded me that Christian joy is found not primarily in what we accomplish, but in God's presence with us.

Conclusion – The Camino continues

The world may constantly change, and discipleship may require us to keep moving, but following Jesus is the same as before. We are still called to travel lightly, depend on God and others, love our neighbours, persevere through difficulty, and trust Christ one step at a time. It didn't lead me to invent a new mode of discipleship. Rather, it allowed me to rediscover the old one through my feet. Amen.