

KMarie Tejada:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

KMarie Tejada:

Welcome to morning prayers. If you please stand as you're able, and join me in our responsive reading, which this morning is Psalm 30. It is found in your black Appleton Psalter book on page 15.

KMarie Tejada:

"I will exalt you, oh God, because you have lifted me up and have not let my enemies triumph over me.

Congregation:

O my God, I cried to you, and you restored me to health?

KMarie Tejada:

For divine wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye, divine favor for a lifetime.

Congregation:

Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning.

KMarie Tejada:

While I felt secure, I said, "I shall never be disturbed. You, O God, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains."

Congregation:

Then you hid your face, and I was filled with fear.

KMarie Tejada:

I cried to you, O God, I pleaded with you saying.

Congregation:

What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit, will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?

KMarie Tejada:

Hear, O God, and have mercy upon me, O God, be my helper.

Congregation:

You have turned my wailing into dancing, you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.

KMarie Tejada:

Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing, O God, my God, I will give you thanks for ever.

Choir:

(Singing)

Diana Eck:

A bit of scripture this morning from Acts 17, Paul in Athens, "The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything at all, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath. From one ancestor, he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and allotted the times of their existence, and the boundaries of the places where they would live so that they would search for God, reach after him and find him, though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being."

Diana Eck:

Well, many in this church have taken the theme of pilgrimage this year as a kind of spiritual theme, and as we move through the weeks of lent, pilgrimage becomes deeper and more personal, more deliberate perhaps. In many respects, I've been a lifelong professional Pilgrim. I'd been fascinated by the kinds of journeys we human beings undertake along life's way. We make journeys to discover meaning out there, on the mountain top, journeys to the frontier of our experience, what I call outward-bound journeys, and we make journeys to the source, homeward, homeward-bound journeys to find our people, our roots, our very selves.

Diana Eck:

In the long years of my work in India, I was definitely an outward-bound Pilgrim. It began as a 20 year old in the city of Banaras, a sacred city, so very, very far from home, a place crowded with pilgrims, dense with shrines, that brought me back again, and again, and again until I finally wrote a book about it, and even then, it didn't let me go. From Banaras, over the course of two decades, I traveled tens of thousands of miles by train, and bus, and rickshaw, and on foot, occasionally in car, and seeking out other places of pilgrimage.

Diana Eck:

These places that Hindus called Tirthas, crossing places, powerful places here on earth that link us to a divine dimension. So off I went, shrines of Vishnu and Shiva, Kedarnath and Badrinath in the high Himalayas, Gangotri, the Himalayan source of the Ganga, Amarkantak, the headwaters of the Narmada River, Tala Calvary, where the calvary rises in the Court Hills of the South, the Seacoast shrines of the South, Ramashram and kanyakumari, and others.

Diana Eck:

These tracks of pilgrims link millions and millions of homes to these, and other countless places, and I wanted to know what these kinds of shrines, and temples, and alters mean to those who crisscross India to seek them out. What do they mean to communities, to regions, to national identity? And by the way, what do they mean to me? Of course, trekking to these high sanctuaries, sanding on hilltops, entering the sanctuary of ancient temples, it did change me as well. I couldn't just study pilgrimage. I became, yes, a pilgrim myself. I sometimes quipped, as you know, that I had prayed at more Hindu shrines than any living Methodist, and in many ways, these were hard journeys. Exhausting, risky, sometimes scary,

mostly joyous. My dog-eared train schedule, my train journey at night to Kathgodam, the bus journey up the hills and mountains to L Maura, the trail head to Kedarnath, the uncertainty of pilgrim rest houses, where on earth I might end up sleeping that night.

Diana Eck:

I was truly stepping off the grid into worlds quite unknown to anyone back home. This was the 80s by the way, and years before email or cellphones, and I would send telegrams home to Dorothy, poor thing, to give her some vague sense of where on earth I might be.

Diana Eck:

Now, what I found along the way, and at journey's end was often surprising. There, up at 14,000 feet, in the dark interior of a high mountain temple was simply a stone outcropping, with a flower, or there at a hilltop shrine was a tree wrapped with red threads. There was water tank, collecting the blessed headwaters of a river. These were not monuments built by kings, but earth altars, sanctified by the faith of those who sought them out, turned aside from their lives, stood before them for countless centuries.

Diana Eck:

Oh yes, there might be a temple, but that was often very much beside the point, and no wonder that I thought of St. Paul, and what he really meant, I think, when he told the Athenians and the rest of us that whatever you mean by what you called God, if you use that word, does not dwell in shrines made by human hands. The poet saints of South India knew this very well, praising that one who is right here, the lord of the meeting rivers, right here where the herons weighed, where the hillock rises, where the palms sway over the estuary, where the mangoes smell sweetest.

Diana Eck:

Those heady, risky days, as a 30-something, of 40-something, days off the grid in the solitude of the trail, or in the tumble of crowds of pilgrims. Those days are most certainly over, over for me, but what I learned about alters from these Hindu Tirthas, I gratefully carry into my life as a 70-something, where life is no longer about onward and upward, about achieving goals or climbing mountains. The altar may be a glorious tree, a weeping willow, right there in the sunshine on Broadway, a single crocus saying, "Hello." In the dry leaves, a simple fire circle in the backyard of a dear friend, the full moon rising over Mount hope Bay, or the Canadian geese flashing their V across the sky, a table with a candle, a flower, a stone, a shell, a photograph.

Diana Eck:

Here, right here is our communion at the altars of this world. These are our Tirthas, where amidst the onrush of our lives, we cross over, perhaps only for a moment, to behold another dimension, a dimension some refer to as the sacred. Is it a crossing heavenward, or inward, or to the real, to the mystery? Frankly, it doesn't matter how we put it. The Tirthas do not encircle or circumscribe the holy, for the one we call God does not dwell in shrines made by human hands, the Tirthas are the gateways where the here and the timeless meet.

Diana Eck:

Let us pray. As we breathe the breath of life, this March morning, and set forth on the pilgrimage of this day. May we open our eyes to the altars of this very world. May we turn aside, now and again, from the rush of today, may we stop to touch the warmth of a friend's hand, and to be touched by the warmth of

the sun. May we bow often as we behold the willow and the crocus. May we be filled with gratitude, for the abundance of this very life, and together, may we pray, our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Diana Eck:

The hymn, happily, is number 40. Is that it? 44. Four, zero, morning has broken. Isn't that great? Four, zero. Wonderful.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing)

KMarie Tejada:

And now let us go in peace and joy, loving God and others today and forever. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.