



**being & belonging**  
**MARGERY KEMPE (c1373-c1438)**  
**wandering towards God | on pilgrimage**

“O God, who granted to the children of Israel to pass through the middle of the sea with dry steps,  
and who revealed thee to the three wise men through the guidance of a star,  
grant us, we beg thee, a prosperous path and calm weather,  
so that we might be worthy of arriving at the place where we are going and, finally, at the gate of eternal happiness”  
*the Belles Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry (1409)*

### **Where God is, there is heaven also**

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I enjoyed great peace of soul...and each day I knew high contemplation in prayer, holding my holy talks and colloquies with our Lord Jesus Christ both morning and afternoon...I truly felt that my heart glowed from such holy talk with our Lord as we spoke together many times. For instance, he might say to me, and he did so frequently: ‘my dear daughter, love me with all your heart, for I love you with all my heart and with all the power of my Godhead; for in my sight you have always been my chosen soul as a pillar of my Holy Church. I always gaze on you in mercy, for you would never be able to endure the hatred and contempt that lie ahead for you without the support of my grace.’ From then on I found much joy when I was criticized simply because I loved God. It gave me great pleasure and comfort when I was blamed and scolded for openly loving Jesus; that it to say, when I condemned sin and praised goodness, or when I insisted on repeating gospel texts I had heard in sermons, or when I went to the trouble of consulting with priests...Then our Lord put these words in my mind:...’Remember whatever befalls, where God is, there is heaven also: God is in your soul with many an angel surrounding you and guarding you night and day. For when you set out for church, I go with you; when you sit at table, I am at your side; you go to bed and I come, too; even when you leave town, remember that I journey with you. Daughter, there was never a child to pleasing and attentive to his father as I will be to you, helping you and keeping you at every step...’  
*(The Book of Margery Kempe, translated by John Skinner, 54-57)*

### **I was prompted in my soul to visit certain places for my spiritual good**

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I knew at last that our Lord had forgiven me all my sins...I had a great longing to see for myself the place where he was born. And I wished especially to see for myself the place where he was born...to visit the place on earth where he had suffered his passion and where he died,...all those holy places where he spent his life on earth as well as those he came to after his resurrection. And while I longed greatly to make this journey to Jerusalem, our Lord also bade me to go to Rome and to Santiago de Compostela...For two whole years I would gladly have set out, yet I had no money to make any of these journeys. So that I prayed to our Lord and asked of him: ‘Where shall I get money enough to make these journeys to such Holy Places?’ (58-59)

### **Now at length, it was time to set out on pilgrimage**

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When we landed in the Holy Land, we were taken on donkeys to Jerusalem. And so it was that when I first set eyes on Jerusalem, I was astride a donkey; I was so moved that I thanked God from the bottom of my heart, and I prayed of his mercy that just as he had brought me safely here to see the earthly city of Jerusalem, so he would grant me his grace to see the city of bliss above, the heavenly Jerusalem. At that moment, I knew in my heart that our Lord Jesus Christ would one day grant me my desire. I was so filled with joy and consolation at speaking in this way with our Lord that I was in danger of falling from my donkey, such was the sweetness and grace that I experienced in my soul. But two pilgrims came to my rescue and made sure I did not fall...’Sirs, I told them, ‘don’t be annoyed by my weeping here in this holy place; for this is the very land where our Lord Jesus Christ lived and died.’

As we pilgrims were led to the very places where our Lord suffered his pains and his passion, each man and woman carried a candle, and the friars were able to give us a running commentary on what our Lord had

suffered at each point. And I began to weep and sob; it was as if I were watching our Lord with my own eyes suffering his passion at that very moment. At the same time, in my soul I saw him most truly in my contemplation; this all this caused such compassion for him...I was quite unable to prevent myself from crying out loud, a kind of roar it was, even though it might have been the death of me...My cries were so earsplitting, so sudden that people were taken unawares, save for those who heard me cry out before and knew what it was about...I would try as hard as I could to hold it in, so that people should not hear me or get annoyed – but the more I struggled to keep it in, the louder would I cry when it came to the surface. (103-106)

**Irritated by my continual tears** and the way I would speak openly all the while about the love and goodness of our Lord, both at table when we ate together as well as in other places...all of the other pilgrims agreed that I should no longer stay with the party. And they left me that same night. The next morning one of the group...asked me to apologize and tell them I would behave myself with extra care. I went along with this and so it was agreed but it only led to more trouble and greater distress. As the journey continued so too did their torments. They cut my gown so short that it only came down just below my knees...so people would take me for a fool. While at table they made me sit below everyone so that I scarcely dared open my mouth...There was no way I could remain a member of their party unless I agreed to stop my tears and cease going on so about being holy. (99) But I must speak about my Lord Jesus Christ even if the whole world had forbidden me. So I had no option but to take to my room and eat alone for the next six weeks... To add to my distress, my companions not only excluded me from their table but quietly went ahead with their sailing arrangements behind my back. (103)

**As I knelt upon the stone floor** hearing one mass and then a second, our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to me: 'My daughter, you do not come to this place in need of anything other than your reward and merit, since your sins were already forgiven before you came. I tell you that you are come here to increase your merit and reward. I am pleased with you, my daughter... I command you to visit Rome and to Saint James of Compostela and do as I say. Remember I am above the Holy Church and I myself shall go with you and keep you safe always...' (111) "Set out on your way, daughter, in the name of Jesus, for I am truly the spirit of God; I shall help you with your every need, I shall go with you and support you in every place you come to. Never mistrust me; you never found me misleading you, for I have never bidden you do anything that is not to God's honor and profit to your soul if you should carry it out; believe me, I shall pour great grace into you. (116)



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