

FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



June 2009



I'M GOING TO ISRAEL

PASTOR TROY

Thanks to the gracious permission of the Session of our church, and to a generous foundation set-up for pastors, I'll be going to Israel in the month of June. Let me tell you a little bit about how it all started.

I received a phone call last spring from my friend Shane Berg, who is a professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary (Shane preached here immediately following my wedding – we, incidentally, both graduated from the same college and seminary). He had just been appointed the team leader for the Holy Land Pastoral Renewal Program through Princeton. I had heard about the program during my seminary time there, a program that provides funding for pastors who had served the church for at least five years, to visit the places where Jesus lived, taught, died and was raised.

The program is not a “holy” tour, much like the Medieval Christian practice of visiting sites to see their relics and somehow tap into a divine power present in a particular place. The Holy Spirit lives and moves in the church, its people, throughout the world – not inanimate objects or tracts of land. The program is specifically called a “pilgrimage,” where we, as pilgrims, travel in order to learn. It's more about the journey than the destination or “sites.”

The program does not want this to be a glorified “tourism” experience either. It is intended for pastors to have a time of education, renewal and growth through a carefully designed program of biblical site excursions along with study, prayer, worship and group interaction. A renewal of pastoral ministry, and, specifically, a renewal of preaching is the programs intended goal. To move pastors more deeply into the words of Jesus in the Gospels by visiting the sites that such passages describe has had a transformative effect on many past participants and I hope that will be the case for me as well.

Well, needless to say, Shane didn't have to paint much of a picture for me to be excited about the prospect – a trip to Israel, underwritten by a generous foundation, along with friends and colleagues that I know and love. I told him I was in last spring, and here we go in June. If there has been any hesitancy about the opportunity, it's the fact the David was just born – I can hardly imagine two weeks

away from all three of my family. But Leslie's family has been behind this and they will be supporting her and the boys during my short time away. Please pray for us all.

When I return, we will schedule a time in which I will show pictures of my trip, explain the significance of particular sites, and reflect on the experience as a whole. In the meantime, I've included here a description of the program, an itinerary of the trip, and a map of the places I'll be visiting.

Check our website for a Google Calendar of my trip. Also, a blog-site has been set up by Shane that will be updated during the trip. You can follow along at: <http://www.ptsholylandtour2009.wordpress.com>.

THE HOLY LAND PASTORAL RENEWAL PROGRAM

The purpose of this program funded by the CF Foundation is to provide pastors in mid-career with an opportunity for retreat and spiritual renewal in the context of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Daily excursions in Galilee, Jerusalem and Bethlehem allow the pastors to identify profoundly with the life and ministry of Jesus. Combined with study, meditation, group discussions and worship, the pilgrimages are intended to enable the participants to make this identification in life shaping ways.

Each pilgrimage group consists of approximately twenty pastors under the leadership of a pilgrimage chaplain. The groups assemble at a conference or retreat center in advance of the trip to get to know each other, deal with the practical matters of travel, and begin to prepare spiritually for the experience ahead. The pilgrimage itself lasts two weeks with approximately half of that time spent in Galilee and the remaining half in Jerusalem. Each morning the pilgrimage group makes an excursion to places related to Jesus' ministry, leaving the remainder of the day for private and group study, reflection and worship under the guidance of the pilgrimage chaplain. The emphasis of this program is on retreat, reflection and renewal, not on tourism. Only selected sites are visited. Some weeks after returning, the pilgrimage group assembles at the conference or retreat center for further reflection, sharing, celebration and closure.