

Pilgrim Places: Taizé  
Robyn Vesey

My pilgrim place is Taizé, a village in France where there is an ecumenical Christian community. Many of you will know Taizé, and recognise the music written by the community, which we often sing in our services, and at our monthly Taizé night service.

I first went to Taizé when I was 19. I had been baptised and confirmed as a Christian only a few months previously, into a liberal Anglican church, and faith was very new to me. I have been many times since then, more recently for a week of silence every couple of years or so. Going to Taizé always feels like coming home, and the picture I have chosen is of the welcome sign that is on the road at the entrance to the community, as you can see written in many languages. To talk in a common language people in Taizé often speak a brilliant version of English, which I myself come to speak in by the end of a week there – it is English spoken with an odd sentence structure, slightly mispronounced words and simple language – it is a beautiful opposite of the Tower of Babel: people from all over the world can encounter and understand each other.

The first time I spent a week in silence at Taizé, I discovered a very small little chapel, underneath the church and I would go there to pray twice daily in the individual prayer time. It was both difficult and amazing. What I realised in that space is that meeting God is nothing to do with me, what I do or deserve, but a confidence that God is there when I show up - even when I don't feel it. That God is not withholding, or conditional, it's just that we feel different things in those moments we might call prayer. I spent hours in that space, feeling all kinds of things: emptiness, boredom, calmness, triumph, frustration and despair. And I also experienced moments of beauty more real than anything I have ever known.

My experience is that you don't need to come from a Christian or religious family to feel that you are, or have done, something bad that you have to make up for. But held in the gentle rhythm of prayer and care in the Taizé community I discover and re-discover that God is good and that at the centre of life is a gift, however welcome or unwelcome the events in my life are at the time.