



*Jana Kaye*

On March 17, 2011, I walked off a plane in Rome, Italy relieved and thankful I had arrived. My concerns did not include whether the plane would safely take off and land; rather I wondered whether *I* would take off and land, actually make every connection. I have a history of derailed travel plans and had nearly given up on success. However, since I was a young girl I have wanted to see Italy, home of my paternal great-grandparents. So when C.S. Lewis Academy in Newberg, Oregon offered a trip to Italy and Greece, I signed up, along with my son, Andrew, who is a student there.

Our trip, called The Cradle of Civilization, focused on historic sites written of in ancient texts, including the Bible. While viewing art and architecture depicting the Scriptures and walking roads Paul and other apostles had walked to spread the good news, Andrew and I experienced Christ and gained a more visual understanding of the early church. I'm thankful that of all the travel plans I've made, God allowed these, along with a more tangible knowledge of himself, his Word, and other Christians who desired to know and proclaim Christ.

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 16:1, 3, 9*

Recently my son, Andrew, and I traveled to Italy and Greece with a group of 27 students and chaperones from his school. For nearly one year before we departed, we gathered for monthly meetings at the home of our group leader, Susan, to prepare. Susan had traveled to Italy and Greece as well as several other countries leading educational tours, first on her own and later with ACIS, an educational travel club that helps guide and plan tours.

Even with the help of ACIS we still had much to discuss and plan during our meetings, such as how to raise funds to pay for our trip, what American cultural norms to avoid that might offend Italians and Greeks, what to notice about the art and architecture we would see, how to pack eleven days' worth of clothing into one small carry-on bag, and how to avoid getting robbed.

We recognized our need of God's guidance, so we began and ended every meeting with prayer. We understood our plans could change at a moment's notice, but as we prayed, we also believed that no plans would change apart from the will and purpose of God. Within that truth, we were able to be thankful for *all* things and not be anxious. As we traveled, each night we reflected on the day's events and remembered our prayers of the previous year. We noticed God's presence, provision, and guidance within the details.

*SONG: I Have a Savior Who Guides Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Lord, for planning and directing our steps.*

—Jana Kaye

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 34:1-10*

After traveling 20-some hours we arrived in Rome, Italy around 8:30 a.m. Julia, our Welsh tour manager, and Giuseppe, our Italian bus driver, met us at the airport and immediately took us to the Piazza Navona. The rain poured down, but being Oregonians familiar with rain, we put up our hoods and listened to Julia describe the Piazza square and the Pantheon, originally commissioned by Marcus Agrippa as a temple to all the gods of ancient Rome.

In her beautiful Welsh accent, Julia told us we had arrived on the day Italians celebrated their 150th year of unification. A brass band played on the Pantheon porch, and crowds of Italians and tourists blocked the entrance. Exhausted from our many hours of travel, we refused to let the rain and crowds dampen our spirits and gloried in the fact that we had finally arrived in Italy. We wanted to experience every moment, good or bad.

We pressed our way into the Pantheon and admired the concrete dome, marble pillars, and statues. Soon, one of the students in our group discovered her camera had been taken from her belt. After the initial shock and disappointment waned, we realized we could be thankful for much. Her camera had cost little; her expensive memory card remained safely tucked into her backpack; and another traveler in our group loaned her a spare camera. As we toured the Pantheon, named from the Greek meaning “for every god,” we immediately recognized the hand of the One True God with us.

*SONG: O God, We Want to Thank Thee*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we thank you for always protecting and providing for us.*

—Jana Kaye

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 2:1-7*

After much-needed sleep, we awoke to our first full day in Italy. It began with a tour of Vatican City. Andrew and I, along with our group, received our tickets and bypassed the long lines waiting to enter. Clear blue skies and warmth made enjoyable our time on the terrace overlooking the statues and courtyard. Before we entered the museums, our guide stopped us by a picture of the Sistine Chapel. She said we must be silent and reverent in the chapel, so she would tell us about Michelangelo's frescoes before we entered.

As our guide described the panels, she told the story of creation as written in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. She said the panels depict separation of light from darkness, creation of heaven and earth, separation of land from sea, etc. I listened to her speak of these things we know from the Old Testament. Then she spoke of the panel depicting the creation of Adam, the powerful figure of the Creator and his angelic court on one side and motionless Adam with his perfect anatomy on the other. She said, "The weak hand of the first reclining man waits hopefully for the invisible spark which will burst from God's finger." As I listened to these words, I recognized the spiritual truth that we have no life or strength without God shaping us with his hand and breathing life into us. I looked toward Andrew and saw in his face the awe I felt.

*SONG: How Great Thou Art*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, may we be as Adam in Michelangelo's fresco, waiting hopefully with hands outstretched toward you.*

—Jana Kaye

*BIBLE READING: Acts 2:22-36*

During our first full day in Rome we kept moving; by the end of it we calculated we had walked 11 miles. After touring the Vatican in the morning, Giuseppe drove us to the Roman Forum and the Coliseum, originally named “Flavian Amphitheater.” We learned it was later named Coliseum to honor the colossal statue of Nero positioned nearby.

During our morning devotions that day we discussed the role of blood in Roman history, within the Coliseum, and particularly, in Christian history. The history speaks of wicked thoughts and actions that stem from humans’ sinful hearts and our need of a savior. We talked about the blood sports presented in the Coliseum, some of the worst during Nero’s reign. We considered the many animals and humans sacrificed for spectators’ amusement. We pondered the Christian martyrs’ blood, shed in defense of their faith, and most importantly, Christ’s blood, shed for our redemption and salvation. We could not walk through the enormous structure without reflecting on the evil humans can inflict on one another, but more importantly on the power of God to bring salvation and life out of death.

We cannot have life without blood, whether flowing through our earthly bodies to sustain earthly life or flowing from Christ to atone for our sin. It is only through Christ’s shed blood and his resurrection that we receive his gift of eternal life.

*SONG: Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for shedding your blood, cleansing us from all unrighteousness, and giving us eternal life. You have done this not because of anything we have done but because of who you are and your great love for us.*

—Jana Kaye

*BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 6:1-5; Revelation 22:13*

Halfway through our trip we traveled by ferry from Italy to Patra, Greece. Waiting to greet us were Katia, our Greek tour guide, Artimas, our bus driver, and lots of glorious sunshine. Artimas drove us to our first stop: Saint Andrew's Cathedral.

Saint Andrew's was my Andrew's favorite of all the cathedrals and basilicas we visited. He loved the bright blues, yellows, and light flowing through. I loved the peace, beauty, and presence of the Holy Spirit. As Katia led us through the cathedral, she referred to the gods of ancient Greece as "cult religion" and spoke of the "one true God" revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Beginning our tour of Greece in Saint Andrew's Cathedral set the foundation of our trip on Christ. We planned to visit ancient ruins at Delphi and the Acropolis, sites of temples and icons created to worship the cult religion gods. Katia said the Cathedral icons were not meant to be worshiped, rather to remind us of Christ. They displayed the artistry of Creator God at work in and through humans. She said when the Greek Orthodox crossed themselves in front of an icon, it was not in reverence of the icon but in reverence of God. She positioned her fingers to form the Greek letters alpha and omega to represent our God who is the Alpha and Omega, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I appreciated the continual reminder that God alone, not icons or actions, is worthy of worship and praise.

*SONG: Awesome God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Creator God, you alone are holy. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God forever and ever.*

—Jana Kaye

*BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; John 14:1-6*

Our second day in Greece we traveled to Delphi, the site ancient Greeks believed to be the center of the world and a sacred place. They established an oracle there. Leaders and individuals traveled to the oracle from great distances to seek the gods' advice about wars, marriages, and other important events. They brought extravagant gifts to the gods and housed them in marble sanctuaries along "the sacred way," the path leading to the main sanctuary.

As Andrew and I walked along the path we marveled at the beauty of mountains and scents of herbs and flowers surrounding us. The sanctuaries and treasuries impressed us, especially since they had been built without modern equipment, but the God-created beauty surrounding us often distracted from what humans had built.

We wondered about the slaves who had labored there and who had inscribed their names into the stones, and we wondered about the Christians who had placed slabs of stone, with crosses etched on them, along the sacred way. I imagined their desire to tell seeking travelers about the true Sacred Way, of Jesus who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The ancients brought gifts of gold, ivory, and bronze in exchange for words of wisdom. God says to bring nothing but our lives and our love for him.

*SONG: Agnus Dei*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I pray you will help us always follow the true Sacred Way, which is Christ.*

—Jana Kaye

*BIBLE READING: Acts 17:22-31; 1 Corinthians 3:16*

“Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: *to the unknown god*. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands’” (Acts 17:22-24, NKJV).

The Areopagus, which the Romans called Mars Hill, sits in the midst of modern Athens, and from it one can see the Acropolis with its temples dedicated to the cult goddess, Athena. Paul’s full speech, which we read in Acts chapter 17, is engraved in metal and attached to the side of the rock, still speaking the truth of him Paul proclaimed many years ago.

Standing on that rock where Paul stood, seeing the temples made by human hands, and hearing again the truth of the One who “gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25, NKJV), I thanked God for making me his temple, for his Holy Spirit within me. I thanked him for his Word, the Bible, through which he teaches us all things.

*SONG: The Solid Rock*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for the opportunity to stand on that rock with my son, Andrew, and see the place Paul preached this important message. But even more, thank you for the rock that is Christ and that in him we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).*

—Jana Kaye