

BELIEF *By the Rev. Kathryn Barlow-Williams*

# Spiritual journey absent of real-world obligations

"Eat, Pray, Love": With verbs like that, the book had to be great, or so I thought.

Years ago I tried to fast during Holy Week, but it was an epic failure. My stomach growled so fiercely I could not hear God. Blinded by carnal visions of hamburgers, milk shakes and chocolate, I could not see God, either. My irritation with all humanity increased in direct proportion to my growing hunger pangs. Finally I broke down and ate because no one likes a cranky pastor.

The title "Eat, Pray, Love" suggested I could enjoy food and be spiritual at the same time. However, after reading a few pages, I was annoyed. The autobiography chronicles author Elizabeth Gilbert's spiritual journey. Divorcing her husband and



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quitting her job, she left the comforts of home to travel the world in search of her true self.

Most people loved Gilbert's story. The book quickly became an international bestseller and was made into a movie starring Julia Roberts. Time magazine even named the author one of the top 100 influential people in the world. Clearly I was one of the few who was more irritated than inspired by her.

To celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the book, the publisher is seeking writers to contribute to a collection of essays called



Courtesy photo

**Julia Roberts plays Liz Gilbert in the movie "Eat Pray Love," based on Gilbert's popular memoir.**

"Eat Pray Love Made Me Do It."

My submission would most certainly be rejected. "Eat, Pray, Love" didn't make me do anything but wonder how anyone could have so much free time and money. As I read her book, I wondered, "Who couldn't be spiritu-

al if they didn't work, pay a mortgage, nurture a marriage and raise children?" In the movie, Roberts ate mountains of pizza and pasta but never gained an ounce. Nirvana never looked so good.

No doubt Gilbert is brave and inspired. To find her dream, she first

had to leave her husband, work, family and friends. Many of us get stuck in misery because we dread facing the nightmare that comes with change. When the devil we know asks us to dance, we say yes simply because we are terrified to sit alone. Gilbert took a bold, lonely step to fulfill her dreams.

That lonely step enabled her to choose when and where she wanted to go. She didn't have to justify her expenses to a spouse. She didn't listen to children whine, "I'm bored, I'm hungry," or "I'm thirsty." When kids fought for the window seat, left a cellphone on a shuttle bus or picked up head lice, she was not expected to fix it. Gilbert simply got on a plane, buckled her seat belt and flew into the wild blue yonder to live her dream.

Few of us can drop everything to fulfill our heart's desire. To find our spiritual center, we must navigate the traffic of ordinary life, weaving work and mundane tasks such as grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, paying bills, changing diapers, chauffeuring kids and getting the oil changed. We must dig deep to find God who lives within and around us.

We can eat, pray and love while managing a cacophony of tangled needs. When we do that, our eyes can open wide enough to see divine glory hidden in our ordinary, sometimes boring, often frustrating, but always amazing lives.

*The Rev. Kathryn Barlow-Williams is senior pastor at Oak Hills Presbyterian Church.*