



30 June 2013
Sung Eucharist
The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
Galatians 5 vv. 1, 13–25
Luke 9 vv. 51–end

For the Journey
By The Rev'd Duncan Dormor
Dean, St John's College

'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'

Today's gospel presents us with the opportunity to reflect on two deeply-seated aspects of the human condition – the desire for security, for belonging, for safety, for reassurance, in short - for home, and that restless desire to move, to discover, to seek the new, to come to a different place, in short - for the journey. In that sense, 'Home' and 'The Journey' are archetypal and in their many manifestations and elaborations speak to our human experience.

This tension is constantly played out throughout our society and its various cultural forms. One small example can be found in 'For the journey' - the slogan for an advertising campaign now in its 7th year from a leading bank in which customers are told that the bank in question, Lloyds, will help customers 'get to where they want to go in life'. The campaign delivered with the reassuring warm tones of Julie Walters acknowledges life's unpredictable journey with its unexpected twists and corners, joys and tragedies but repackages them such that the events and incidents of life portrayed are cocooned in a warm bath of animation, bright colours and chirpy musak. The journey of life portrayed is one in which the bank is there to protect and exclude all serious risk and danger (...which is of course all deeply ironic given the reality of banking in the last six years). It is seductive - as advertising is intended to be - because it manages to do the two things simultaneously – it talks of change and risk and journeying yet it provides a continuity of mood that assures you that the journey is entirely safe and risk-free – which of course human life is not.

There can be something of this sense of comfort in returning to St John's – its longevity, its stability, its sheer 'thereness' can provide an anchor, a fixed point in life to be returned to, tempting the comment for some that 'it never changes', which of course it does.

As an institution, rather like the bank with its advert, we would like to think that at some level we do contribute to preparing people 'for the journey' and may even help them to 'get to where they want to go in life'. And to an extent I'm sure we do, BUT at the end of the day the Christian gospel is clear – human institutions can never fully provide what we really need, can never envelope us and fulfil our humanity - and if we hide in nostalgia, even hide in duty and loyalty and piety – which Jesus alludes to in his notorious text – 'Let the dead bury the dead' then we will never discover the fullness of what God is calling us to. Furthermore there is a curious but profound paradox about wanting to feel secure, namely that the search for a feeling of security is actually what causes the feeling of insecurity in the first place. Attempts to stand aside and be separate from the chaotic, challenging, ever-changing flow of life are exactly what generates insecurity; in short the more security I can get, the more I shall want.' (FN – Burkemann).

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Those who follow Christ with his ‘face set’ to his future and his cross in Jerusalem were originally described as followers in ‘The Way’. That Way provides a clear focus for our human yearnings for security, and our restless strivings for fulfilment - in the promise of the Kingdom of God. On the one hand it appears to us as a destination, a goal, a fulfillment, the ‘end of all our strivings’; An elusive destination, something for which one strives which cannot be completely arrived at in our present state – yet a goal which casts a bright, searing, sceptical light on all attempts to idealise or idolise all human communities - even those as wonderful as St John’s. On the other hand the Kingdom of God is within, is here, is now, can be the road by which we travel - and if we give ourselves over to be guided by the spirit, if we allow ourselves to be shaped by its characteristics of (go slow)... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, we will find ourselves capable of negotiating each and every twist and turn of that journey; every journeying and homecoming. Amen