

St. Laurence Frodsham : Easter 7 : 24th. May 2020

How does it feel being stuck in one place?

Most of us, I guess, are able to get out for walks. We're so lucky to live in a town which is on the edge of some beautiful countryside. Have a thought, then, for those who are not so lucky and maybe only have a window to open onto their lockdown world!

I've been using some of my time while I've been stuck in one place reading books on my shelves that I'd not read before – yes – there are a few! I've been reading books about travel - about wandering around - about walking - about being in places far from home. Many of you will know that I have had many opportunities to travel across the world - nearly always with several friends. But we travel independently - often staying in simple accommodation - using buses and trains – on one occasion even a camel – to get about. I wonder, now, whether that will be possible in the future? Who knows? But I look back with gratitude – lucky to have lived through a time when it has been possible to see much of the world.

One of the books I've been reading is called "The Songlines" (1), a book by Bruce Chatwin which I think I picked up one Thursday at the Parish Hall Coffee Morning. 'Songlines' are ancient tracks made of songs that Australian Aboriginals believe tell stories of the creation of the land. In the middle of the book the author pauses his Australian adventure to pull together some travel notes from his many journeys across the world. Some of those notes seem particularly useful to illustrate what I want to say this morning. Here - for example - is one about walking. He says that in Sufi Islam the action or rhythm of walking has been used as a technique for dissolving the attachments of the world and so allowing people to lose themselves in God. Allowing people to lose themselves in God!

Wow! That idea of stepping into the unknown and the possibility of losing ourselves in God caught my imagination. Of course, we don't have to go halfway round the world to lose ourselves in God. But we do need to make the effort to go out - go somewhere – anywhere - and be prepared to wander about because those Sufi mystics suggest that it's not human nature to be stuck in one place.

Well, today is the last Sunday of the Easter season and we focus on the story of the Ascension from Luke's Gospel. Luke spells out the story of Jesus as a remarkable adventure – a walk - a journey – from birth - through ministry - through death and on to resurrection. Luke's account of the story ends with the

ascension. He seems to be saying that now things can never be the same. God's love for his creation has replaced our greedy struggles for world domination. Ultimately it is God who is in control. Now - through the completed work of Jesus - God has opened up for us a boundless hope that can "lift us from dullness" and "turn our hearts to the mending of the world" (2).

Luke went on to write a second volume - the Acts of the Apostles - which tells how those who witnessed the resurrection - travelled around Europe and Western Asia building church communities and making sure that the good news about Jesus became widely known.

So Luke, - perhaps more than any of the other Gospel writers - tells his story as a travelogue. It is a record of how of Jesus and his band of followers wandered around Palestine and then - in the second volume - how the good news about Jesus spread to the wider world.

The three components of Easter: Resurrection - Ascension - Pentecost - mark the highpoint of that good news. This is the moment when what we hope for as we travel on is given shape and purpose. Instead of being stuck in one place we can now travel hopefully - walking on - allowing ourselves to be lost in God.

I'll end with a couple more of Chatwin's travel notes. He quotes the Buddha who says "You cannot travel on the path before you have become the path itself" (3). I guess this is quite a well-known saying of the Buddha but it chimes perfectly with the idea of walking on - losing ourselves in God - trusting that our deepest hopes will not be disappointed. We need to allow the story of God's love in Jesus to take us over. We need to have open hearts that can reach out to the mending of the world. Losing ourselves in God - walking on the path which comes to define us - is not a private journey. It is about meeting people - seeing the world through the eyes of others. And so - finally - here's another ancient saying from India : "There is no happiness for the person who does not travel...therefore wander!" (4).

We are not meant to be stuck in once place!

- (1) Chatwin, Bruce, "The Songlines", 1988, London, Picador
- (2) Shakespeare, Steven, Collect for Ascension Day from "Prayers for an Inclusive Church", 2008, Norwich, Canterbury Press
- (3) Gautama Buddha
- (4) Aitareya Brahmana

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