

Journeying through Life



Life can be viewed as a journey, whether it is spent travelling the world or staying mostly in one place, and if it is short or long in length.

When we are on a journey in a train we are moving towards a destination, stopping briefly at stations and then continuing, with the possibility of relating with fellow passengers or looking at changing scenery.

In our lives as Christians following Jesus, we are also on a journey, not on a train, but with God and working towards God. We are continually being assisted by the Holy Spirit to grow in God's love, whether we are young, middle-aged, old, sick or well, and to share this love with others.

Our life journey, like that of Jesus, starts at birth, moves through our childhood, and on to adulthood. As a Christian, our journey in Christ begins when we state our faith in God, or others do it for us, and we are baptised. We were reminded of such a beginning in January by the Sunday Gospel readings from Luke which told us of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, and Jesus' future ministry. Jesus explained his ministry as, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Luke 4:18-19.

In Luke 4:21-30 we read that all was not easy for Jesus in his ministry, but in Luke 5:1-11 Jesus demonstrates his power, and the first disciples leave all to follow him.

We are called to follow Jesus, not as people living in Palestine 2,000 years ago, but as members of the body of Christ in *our* world. We are to express God's love for all in a ministry that is relevant for today.

When we start a new year, we often make resolutions that will hopefully affect

our future behaviour. In our baptism, we promised to turn from evil deeds to the light of Christ. We were symbolically washed clean with water, and signed with the cross of Christ, showing God's ownership of us. We were then welcomed as a member of the body of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of God. What a fantastic description of who we are! After this we were encouraged to live as a follower of Christ, and as it says in the confirmation service, to daily increase in the power of the Holy Spirit as we *grow* in God's love, and express that love in our ministry of serving others.

If we examine the five acts of Jesus' ministry noted above, we might realise, as some scholars suggest, that the first and last are about proclaiming the good news to the poor, the second and fourth about obtaining real freedom, and the central one, which is the basis of the others, focuses on the blind recovering their sight.

How are we to interpret this description of Jesus' ministry in relation to our ministry today? I do not think we are to go around restoring sight to the blind. But what if 'blindness' can be understood in a different way, perhaps as failing to see what is behind the pain and suffering which are part of daily life for so many? Can we ask Christ to open our eyes to see how God cares for us *all*, and wants us *all* to grow in love through good *and* difficult times? If we do this, our behaviour towards those we would reject may start to change.

For example, as members of Christ's body, proclaiming the good news of God's love, we might need to put aside what we had planned to do and sit down with someone who is upset or distressed. Our time is then given to being with them and listening lovingly to their story. What we had intended to do is left for later.

In another situation we may be challenged to pray for people unjustly treated in our society, and to speak up on their behalf, risking being criticised and becoming unpopular.

Releasing captives, can be interpreted as being freed from our negative feelings and opinions about others. Hate, fear and disgust are feelings contrary to love, and can control and restrict us. We forget that the 'other' is someone who is created by God, made in God's image and loved by God.

Sometimes applying this description to a person who has hurt us, or someone we care about, can be hard. We may not want to open our eyes and hearts so that the Holy Spirit can work through us to show love to that person. But if we do try to see them as God does, we may forgive them as God has so often forgiven us in the past. Accepting being forgiven, and forgiving others, are ways we are freed from the power of hate, and assisted to grow in love.

We might also be avoiding someone with dementia because they are no longer the person we once knew. Yet valuing them as they are, and sharing a loving relationship with them through silence, words, or touch, can be of benefit to both of us, even if he or she quickly forgets it.

Just like on a train journey, we have opportunities in our lives to grow in love when we stop, listen and talk to fellow passengers. We can also see and communicate with the non-human creation, appreciate it and be uplifted by it.

Importantly, our life's journey is not just us growing in love, but in a small way, as members of Christ's body, we are participating in God's work of helping the whole world and its inhabitants to grow in God's love. Let us be encouraged by Jesus' life, to give thanks for God's love, and to share that love with others.

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