

2019-06-30 Sue Diggory

Trinity 2

Luke 9: 51 – end

The Call to Follow

Brendon an Irish monk lived in the sixth century. He was willing to follow God and go wherever he was taken. He set sail with a few companions in a coracle, a small flimsy boat and set off from the Irish coast... willing to go wherever the winds and currents took him, trusting that God would lead him to the place he was most needed. Legend has it that he landed on the coast of America, but where he landed was not important; it was his willingness to journey with God that was important, his willingness to go wherever God took him.

Nine-teen years ago I set out on a journey; fortunately for me and unlike Brendon it did not involve a small coracle and life on the high seas; it was just my car and a short drive from Tunbridge Wells to Tonbridge as I began the fortnightly sessions of the Faith and Ministry Course the 'first step towards anything' course that the Diocese ran at that time.

However, like Brendon I did not know where I was going or what it would lead to; it was the beginning of a new journey, in fact if I am totally honest i wasn't really sure why I had signed up for it! After many twists and turns, the occasional wrong turning, the occasional journey up a cul-de-sac, times of exhilaration as well as times of heartache

my journey finally ended with ordination as priest in the cathedral at Rochester on 26th June 2010, just over 9 years ago.

Or did my journey end there, is there in fact a paradox here; had my journey ended or had my journey only just begun, or is the reality that my journey is a work in progress, a journey that lasts a life-time? For me my journey had in many ways only just begun and although unlike Brendon I didn't have to cross the Atlantic, I did have just over 5 years ago to journey from one edge of the diocese to another, to Crockham Hill and I'm so glad that this is where my journey is currently on pause, that is until God moves me on!

Luke tells us that *Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem*. Galilee was behind him; as he and his disciples set out on their journey towards Jerusalem. Jesus knew where he was going, he knew what lay ahead; he was focused, he was determined; he was a 'man on a mission.'

As they were going along the road someone said to him "I will follow you wherever you go.".... [Jesus] said to another man "Follow me." Still another said "I will follow you, Lord." Three men; two offering to follow and one called to follow; what lessons can we learn from the conversations Jesus had with these three would-be followers.

To the first man who said *"I will follow you, Jesus replied 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'* Animals are

provided for, they have a place to live, they have a place to belong, they have their own natural habitat; but not necessarily so for the Son of man and his followers, no guarantee of a good place to live or even a place to live; no guarantee of social acceptance, because as Christians we *“are in the world, but not of the world,”* often living as aliens in a foreign land, those who are seen as out of step with daily life and 21st century culture.

To the second man Jesus said *“Follow me. But the man replied, ‘Lord first let me go and bury my father.’* Not an unreasonable request. Burial was very important to the Jews and as a son; to leave your Father unburied would have been a scandal! Jesus’ response here reminds us that we can always come up with justifiable reasons for putting our response to him on hold; like those who were invited to the Great Banquet, one man needed to go and see the field he had just bought, another needed to try out the oxen he had just bought, and another couldn’t come because he had just got married! All very plausible reasons to put the call to follow on hold, but we should not be surprised by Jesus’ reaction who *“said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’”*

The needs of the kingdom are more urgent and important than anything; the message here is that Kingdom work must always come first!

The third man also had a good reason for wanting to delay his response to his desire to follow Jesus. *“I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at home.”*

Again a very reasonable request, but yet again we see a response that emphasises that being a disciple must always be the priority *“Jesus replied, ‘No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’* The soil in many parts of Israel is very rocky, take your eye off the plough for a moment and the furrow will have a kink in it; not very helpful for the farmer!

I wonder, did they join the band of disciples and follow, or did they like the Rich Young Man walk away; unable to make the commitment that was being asked of them?

Travelling, or journeying in obedience to God’s call is one of Luke’s central images of what it means to be a Christian. The people in these conversations want to follow, but they want to do it on their terms; and I know I often want to follow on my terms, but Jesus is teaching us here that it must be on his terms; he must always come first and everything else must be in second place; if not the cost of discipleship will be too great and like the seed that fell on the rocky ground, or the seed that fell amongst the thorns in the parable of the sower, we will *“believe for a while, but in the time of testing we will fall away[and will be]choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures [and will not] mature.”*

Jesus is asking us to follow his call and not to look back and risk being knocked off course. The call to follow is not about our yesterdays; remember what happened when Lot’s wife looked back at Sodom, rather it is about our tomorrows and

what we are ready and prepared to do for Christ and his church as we journey with him into the future.

Following it's a lifetimes work; we are always 'on call' for the kingdom, but of course it is a unique call and a unique journey for each of us, and we need to trust that God will only ask of us what we can do, for some it's call to stay at home, for others to journey far away, for some it's a call to serve in this church, for others in the wider parish, or beyond, but wherever the call of Christ on our lives it is not a call to a lonely journey, rather it is a call to an accompanied journey, a journey of friendship and fellowship with the one who calls, the one who offers us unconditional love, simply because we are loved by God and asked in return simply to love him, *"to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and to love your neighbour as yourself,"* to be in relationship with the God who loves us and created us and like Brendon to be willing to journey with God and trust that the wind of His Spirit will lead us to the place we are most needed, to the place where we can be most useful to His kingdom, so as we leave here today the question is are we willing to begin the next step of our journey, a journey which for each of us need never come to an end if we are willing to stick at it, and let it last a lifetime.

Amen.

