

Rachel and I are currently in the process of planning our holiday. We have booked our passage on the ferry – we know when we are leaving and we when we are coming back. We are now in the process of planning the journey – what route are we taking, where are we going to stop, what do we want to see and do along the way. Then of course, what preparations are we going to have to make? We need to check the car, the caravan. We have to arrange insurance. Whatever preparations we make, a journey always involves an element of the unexpected, whether good or bad.

This morning, in the context of our 11 o'clock service we are welcoming Ross Coulter into the family of the Church in Baptism. The pastoral introduction to the Service of Baptism in the Prayer Book begins with these words:

Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which lasts for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love.

BCP 2004 p 357

We are all on that journey, different stages on that journey. Along that road there will be light and dark, joy and sadness; times of great fulfilment, times of worry and confusion..

It is in the nature of this life long journey that there is always more that lies ahead of us, always further to travel, always more to experience, to learn of the God with whom we travel.

Our Gospel reading today is a story of a journey; a journey from doubt and confusion, through encounter and on towards restored hope and faith. It is a very human story and for me is one of the most powerful of the resurrection narratives.

I want to reflect on it this morning in the context of the words of a blessing that I would often use at the end of a service.

Go, and know that the Lord goes with you:
let him lead you each day into the quiet place
of your heart, where he will speak with you;
know that he watches over you –
that he listens to you in gentle understanding,
that he is with you always,
wherever you are and however you may feel:
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Go, and know that the Lord goes with you:

.....

know that he watches over you -
that he listens to you in gentle understanding,

We follow a Lord who accompanies us along the road of life. Sometimes we are aware of that presence. Sometimes our pain is such that we cannot see, we cannot feel his presence – but he is there listening in gentle understanding. And that was their first experience of the stranger who walked with them that afternoon along the road out of Jerusalem – one who listened, listened to their pain, their disappointed hopes.

Having been heard, they began to hear, to listen to what the stranger had to say. Often, too often well meaning friends will try to solve our problems, try to soften our pain before we have had a chance to unburden our pain. Then, and only then can we begin to hear.

Go, and know that the Lord goes with you:
let him lead you each day into the quiet place
of your heart, where he will speak with you;

As the stranger begins to speak, they begin to listen and, as they recall later,
Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on
the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’

At no point has the stranger forced himself upon them. And so as they come to
the end of the day, he prepares to move on – but they want him to stay. He
joined them uninvited but now they want to hear more. And in the simple act
of breaking of bread, their eyes are opened and they see, truly see who has
walked the road with them that day, who has listened to their pain, who has
spoken into their pain, who has brought light into the darkness of their hearts.

As quickly as he has appeared the stranger goes, but now they know they are
not alone, that they will never be alone.

Go, and know that the Lord goes with you:
.....
that he is with you always,
wherever you are and however you may feel.

At the end of the service of Baptism, we say to the child:

‘You have received the light of Christ;
walk in this light all the days of your life.

At whatever stage we are at on the journey of life, may we know

may we know that the Lord goes with us:
that he leads us each day into the quiet place
of our hearts, where he will speak with us;
may we know that he watches over us –
that he listens to us in gentle understanding,
that he is with us always,
wherever we are and however we may feel: