

We are now in the final stages of planning our holiday. At the end of this month we catch the ferry to France and then we travel on towards the south. We have looked at the maps, we've thought about a few campsites. And now we look forward to the journey.

We all undertake journeys, some of them we take alone; others we undertake in the company of others. Of course life is a journey, we are all at different stages along that journey, we all have our own particular experiences along that journey. There are people, companions along the way, who have been important to us, people who have encouraged us, who have loved us, have just been there for us.

The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, tells of journeys. There is the journey of Abram and Sarai in their old age, as Abram is called to leave the security of their homeland in Ur to travel to a place they have never heard of, to the land of Canaan. With it the promise of children, that through him and his descendants they will be a blessing to all mankind. There is the journey down into Egypt, the liberation of God's people as slaves, the journey in the wilderness of Sinai and on into the Promised Land. Then of course there is the Exile in Babylon followed by their return in the reign of Cyrus. In the New Testament, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and his final journey to the Cross and Resurrection.

I want to think this morning on Jesus our companion along the way. A passage of scripture I often find myself returning to in this regard is from Paul's Letter to the Church at Philippi

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward

to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. *Phil 3:12-14*

You know when you are walking across a piece of rough ground and you come to a ditch. There's someone who has gone ahead of you. They stand at the side of the ditch with a hand held out to help you across. I that picture of Jesus going ahead of me, hand held out to help me, to draw me further on in the path of life, of faith. It summons up ideas of companionship, of encouragement.

In Baptism are called to be a follower of Jesus. If we are to follow, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to

run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, *Heb 12:1,2*

Let us go back to that picture of Jesus, hand held out to help us, to draw us further on. In our fellowship with Jesus we are called to be ones to hold out that hand to others, to be the hand of Christ for them – through us, through our actions, our words, our presence we can bring something of the love and presence of God into someone else's life.

Of course, sometimes we can lose sight of Jesus. It may be for a variety of reasons. It might be some crisis hits our life, illness in ourselves or a loved one, loss of job, break up of a relationship, bereavement – and we fell very alone. Jesus just doesn't seem to be around. Or it might be just carelessness on our part – we get so absorbed with other things, we just don't bother looking for him.

As we lose contact, things can drift. Other things can take priority in life. We lose touch with what is important in life, faith, family, relationships.

It is at this point I turn to our Gospel reading for today which is Matthew's account of Jesus walking on the water. But Matthew has one additional feature not related by the other Gospel writers. It is of Peter leaving the safety of the boat and the other disciples and, on Jesus' invitation, stepping out onto the water. In the Gospel account we are given, all is well until Peter takes his eyes off Jesus – he notices the strong wind, he begins to be afraid, he begins to sink.

Peter loses sight of Jesus, but Jesus has not lost sight of Peter and he reaches out to help.

Sometimes in our following of Jesus we are, like Peter, called to leave the security of the boat, the familiar, the safe, our comfort zone. Maybe we find ourselves in a situation of conflict and we discover the difficulty of the path of forgiveness, of reconciliation that Jesus calls us to follow. Or we find ourselves standing alongside a loved one facing serious illness or loss of job and we are only too aware of our inadequacy to help. We find ourselves fearful, we find ourselves sinking. And Jesus is there reaching out to help.

To return to that passage from Philippians:

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Jesus, there alongside us. In the situation of doubt, of suffering, of challenge, reaching out to draw us, to draw those we love closer to him.

In the words of one of the lessons of the Ordination Service, 'Christ's love compels us.' May we respond to that in our own journey of faith. May others

see something of Christ in us, in the values we adopt, in the example we set. May they see something of the love of Christ in our own life and come to show it in their own. Having been blessed by God, may we in turn be a channel of his blessing to others.

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.