

## Bennoch church 7th August 2016

In the great myths and legends, like the journeys of Odysseus, heroes had to leave home, endure dangerous and sometimes mystical journeys and after overcoming everything that was thrown at them, they often returned home. But, home was not as they left it, and they themselves returned very different people.

I want to suggest that we have much in common with these ancient heroes. Not in the literal journeys that we undertake, but I believe that faith in God is a call to leave home and to be a pilgrim people, on the move.

The church lives in new times and is part of a society that does not readily accept the story of Jesus. The accepted patterns of belief, no longer exist. What was once understood as truth, is not longer accepted. The once settled communities where everyone knew their neighbour is a reality of the past. The sign posts that marked out the traditional journey of faith have been taken down, and the church today struggles to read the signs of the times.

Maybe it has always been like that. Christian people called to follow Jesus and to retell his story in such a way that it offers meaning and purpose to life. To add value to who we are as human beings, made in the image of God. Is that not what

people seek in life, purpose? Something beyond themselves that helps make sense of the world.

Maybe as a church we have become 'disconnected' from the great narratives of scripture where journeys were called by God, and people became pilgrims, travelling through new places, looking around, and saying to one another, '*we have never been here before*'; we need to put our whole trust and confidence in God.

Abram who left Ur, was called by God to a place he did not even know. He set out not knowing where he was going; Moses, who led the people of God out of Egypt, across the desert towards the promised land, but think of those, who in spite of slavery, wanted to go back to what they knew; the exiles in Babylon, who through the centuries returned back to their home, that existed only in their memory.

The call of the 12 disciples, who left their nets to follow Jesus. The purpose of the journey, to make them 'fishers of men', and finally, the great apostle Paul, who journeyed the known world to tell the Good news of Jesus Christ. These people journeyed for God, in spite of all the evidence that said, stay at home!

Who now lives in the slipstream of these heroes of the faith? Who is called over and over again to be the pilgrims of God? As a church, I believe we need to reconnect with these journeys of

faith. These journeys are always challenging because it is all about leaving home. It is about leaving what we have known, what we have been comfortable with, knowing, that even if we return, home will no longer exist as it did, because we will be very different people. To our eyes totally unrecognisable. In that sense, we can never return to the past. Our home, before we set out on the journey, no longer exists.

Journeys are much more important than destinations. It is in the unknown places that we learn of who we are and our relationship with God. An American author Richard Rhor uses the phrase to 'fall upwards'. Those learning experiences of life where faith comes into its own. I am talking about the tough times, where vulnerability makes us more open to God. Not steps that are sure and confident, but the uncertain steps of being the pilgrim for God.

It takes faith to be on such a journey. To put our feet into the water so as to allow God to part the waves. The journey continues, not because God performs miracles, but because we are willing to take steps of faith. It is not about waiting and hoping that God will make the way easy or clear. It is about setting out, leaving home, and joining with God who is already ahead of us.

A man called Brian McLaren coined the phrase, *We make the road by walking*. That is what the pilgrim does.

Pilgrimage is not about buildings. It is about people. It is not about entering and remaining. It is about walking beside. Love and justice are not expressed in special places, but out on the road. It is those times in life where sacrifices are made, not knowing what the outcome will be. It is in the exposed places of life, that needs are met, injustice over come, hate vanquished and enemies are loved. Then we can say, faith has taken me to this place. I have left home.

Think about this, who was God happy with, the son dutiful son who remained, or the son who lost everything on the journey, but came home to God. There is a challenge in that story for all of us.

The writer of Hebrews, says this, *"to have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see."* The irony of that hope and certainly is to leave home, and to travel into the unknown.

The paradox of faith is to bring reality to hope, in the things of God, which we cannot yet see. To validate the spiritual journey and to make it as certain as that which we can touch.

Thomas was able to touch the wounds of Christ. That was not faith. Jesus said, *blessed are they who believe without seeing me*. It is about leaving home, and making the road of faith, as in hope, we walk our pilgrim way. Amen.