

### Lent 3

### Truro Cathedral Choral evensong

With Lent in mind I have been reading a book entitled *“Walking to Jerusalem”* by Justin Butcher, subtitled on the cover *“Blisters, hope and other facts on the ground”*. It’s the real life account of a walk some 100 people took over 6 months back in 2017 from London to Jerusalem. It was organised by the Amos Trust on the occasion of the centenary of the Balfour Agreement and the walk came to be known as the *Just Walk to Jerusalem*. It was to express solidarity with the plight of the Palestinians and we knew a couple of the walkers. At one point a walker memorably says: *“I know we’re doing this for the Palestinians but I’m also doing it for me. It doesn’t seem to matter which way round you start. If you go for yourself seeking enlightenment, God, whatever – you end up doing something that has amazing significance to others. If you go ‘for others’ you end up encountering God for yourself.”*

In the season of Lent we are all on a journey to Jerusalem and maybe we’ve set out to give something up for ourselves, for our good or maybe we’ve taken something up for others, for the good of others. But *Don’t just give up for Lent* was the headline in one Christian magazine. One of the local schools here in Truro has begun meat free Mondays to benefit the environment and if we take up such a challenge we might consider donating the money saved to a worthy cause. Then a blind churchwarden from County Durham has set out on public transport with his guide dog Pickle to visit as many cathedrals as he can in aid of a Blind group charity. Walking like that through the days of Lent is like a pilgrimage, an encounter with ourselves and others where we gain insights into our common life, our resilience and vulnerabilities. We will find that we won’t just give up for Lent we will learn from it.

Walking the Camino or closer to home the Saints Way, for example, is becoming more popular in recent years. Bishop Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York designate, said of his experience on a recent sabbatical that there must be other ways to live than trying to get from A to B in the shortest possible time by the shortest possible route. Our Scripture readings this afternoon remind us that the journey is as important as the destination. Bishop Stephen remarked of his personal pilgrimage on the welcome hospitality of strangers that was often unexpected. You can’t choose your fellow travellers either, he said but that brought amazing surprises.

The Israelites in our first lesson were still journeying to their Promised Land and they were encountering the challenges in their time of the wilderness, and of those who would do them harm and thwart their intentions. Moses their leader had died and his assistant Joshua had taken over. They were in danger of losing their way and giving up. The challenge was daunting but God had not deserted them. The words of encouragement we heard reminded me of a children's chorus based on the final verse and maybe you remember it too.

*"Be Strong, be bold for the Lord your God is with you. (Repeat)*

*I am not afraid. No, no, no. I am not dismayed. No, no, no.*

*Come on and walk in faith & victory for the Lord your God is with you."*

There's something about children's songs. One commentator this past week reminded us of the nursery rhyme *Ring-a-ring o' roses*:

*Ring-a-ring o'roses a pocket full of posies,*

*A-tishoo, a-tishoo! We all fall down.*

It's thought that rhyme might have referred to the Great Plague in 1665 or earlier outbreaks of the Black Death where a rosy rash, sneezing and coughing were symptoms. Perhaps like the Israelites as we grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, we might be feeling that we literally want to put on the armour the apostle Paul describes in our second lesson. Paul sought to encourage the early Christians to live as soldiers for Christ in their challenging times. His words exhorting his hearers to put on the whole armour of God to stand firm has inspired many hymns and songs too. It's a call mirroring God's word to Joshua to journey on in faith in the strength and power that God offers. Paul tells us that he is writing from prison shackled, maybe physically in chains but not spiritually. He asks for prayer for boldness to proclaim and live by his faith in the gospel.

Living by faith is the fuel we take on the journey to Jerusalem not just this Lent but on the journey that takes all our lives, that prepares us for that Promised Land. Living by faith puts the tiger in our tank, to coin the words of that old Esso advert. Bishop Stephen remarked that on the Camino he discovered the sobering fact of how little he needed with him, how few things he needed as he set out in faith and encountered God's provision for him on the journey through others that often unexpectedly came across his path. On the Just Walk to Jerusalem people joined at different points of the journey too but each brought something unique to the group and what also became for them a personal pilgrimage.

And that's God's way down the centuries. The people of God have always journeyed through life together and often with the most unexpected companions who have brought something special along the way. We are journeying together and maybe this unexpected coronavirus will help us to see that it is in working together not just here but across the world, it is in and through those that surprise us on the journey that our needs are met not in the abundance of things that many of us possess here in the west. This morning at the cathedral we accepted certificates from Truro Rotary for the twining of our cathedral toilets with parts of the world where such basic sanitation is not taken for granted. Women, in particular, are vulnerable out in the dark and among the undergrowth. The attention we are giving our basic hygienic practices just now remind us that it is a basic human right. The needs of others have become our needs too.

I am leading a Lent Group in one of my parishes and this week we read in other parts of the Old Testament of the theme that Jesus himself took up, that our worship is also to look out for the needy that come across our paths. True worship we read brings our songs and prayers to build a community of faith where we live together and look out for each other, where the needs of others are met through each other. And Jesus like the prophets challenges us that God is not interested in anything else. It is in this holistic view of worship that we form on our pilgrimage in life so to reinvigorate a faith in us that brings life to our common humanity and through the basic needs that we are commanded to share. The days ahead of us this Lent may be uncertain, we may feel inadequate and the journey may be personally and corporately challenging. It is the way of God to bring us together in surprising ways. But from that vulnerability his strength can encourage us in faith to press the pause button and consider afresh how we are going to travel the journey to Jerusalem just as much as we look to its end.

Joshua 1:1-9

Ephesians 6: 10- 20

#### **The Prayer of St. Francis**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love;*

*Where there is injury, pardon;*

*Where there is doubt, faith;*

*Where there is despair, hope;*

*Where there is darkness, light;*

*Where there is sadness, joy;*

*O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek*

*To be consoled as to console;*

*To be understood as to understand;*

*To be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;*

*It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;*

*And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen*