

26th April 2020 Sermon 3rd Sunday of Easter

What steps will you be taking this week ?

Many of us have been inspired by Captain Tom Morgan

And his incredible walk which is raised over 248,000,000 for the NHS taking a small steps around his garden of the care home where he lives

One foot in front of the other until his task was completed – his goal achieved

A veteran of the front line playing his part for those currently serving on a new front line but facing a very different enemy.

It's his 100th Birthday on Thursday so send him a card and please pray for him

I have been fortunate to speak to several of you who have been working on the frontline of our care system these past few weeks and when asked how things are going; your reply has been the same again and again - one step at a time, one day at a time but we're getting there.

Small steps that really make a difference

Others of us have been taking our daily exercises, delivering food parcels, prescriptions newspapers & letters, and the occasional treats to our neighbours and friends as part of our daily exercise one foot in front of the other until our journey through Covid-19 is over

Our passages this week invite us to explore what it means to take steps as a followers of Jesus or to be exact followers of the way

In our reading from Acts there are four steps that Peter is inviting the fledgling followers of the way to embrace. Firstly to repent, Peter doesn't ask the crowd to be sorry for their sins, he asks them to do something far more fundamental than this, The word he uses is repent which at its root means the idea of changing ones mind

Repentance is about choosing to walk a completely new path, which is why Luke keeps referring to the Christian faith as 'following the way' or choosing the way of God. True conversion is not about apologies or protestations of repentance, it's about genuine heartfelt change of mind and heart which results in a new way of walking our life journey.

The second step the second step that Peter invites the apprentices to embrace on, as a mark of their repentance, is to be baptised. Thirdly these new 'followers of the way' are then called to acknowledge they must accept that they are forgiven.

Which is not quite as easy as it sounds - most of our churches are full of people who live with low levels of guilt or shame over their past and present sins, then as a sign of humility referring to themselves as sinners. But Peter is not interested in recruiting an army of self-flagellating sinners, he tells them to pass through the admission that they are sinners and move towards faith that they have been made Saints through the blood of Christ.

Peter didn't need to tell the crowds to admit they needed forgiveness their agonised plea in verse 37 shows that they were well aware of that. But he did need to tell them to believe that they were forgiven. He needed to tell them to believe that their sins had been erased through the gospel and that the power of the cross was more than a match for their sin. Conversion is not just admission of failure it is a confession of faith in Christ's victory.

Finally Peter tells the crowd's that true converts will open up themselves to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit - he does not say this is automatic.

In chapter 19 of Acts Paul tells us that we must first pull down the barriers of ignorance, feelings of inadequacy, of fear, and of indifference; only then - once that we truly believe - in openness and honesty – then when we invite the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and our minds, would we be able to receive.

In our gospel this morning we hear the familiar story of the two apostles reeling from events of the past week and an literally putting one foot in front of the other on their 7mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Caught up in their grief and fear that when Jesus joins them on the road they are unable to recognise him.

Although the stranger walking with them was in fact the Jesus whom they mourned and grieved for they didn't recognise him. Jesus offers an exposition of the scripture proving that the Messiah was meant to suffer these things and then enter into his glory. But still they don't see him it was only when they invited Jesus to stay with them, and brake bread with them, that the veil was lifted and they knew that Jesus was Lord and that he had been raised indeed.

Like those disciples we will be facing our own challenges over the coming weeks. We are not immune to feelings of doubt and despair, filled with misgivings and more bad news, our world makes us question if God is in heaven. When reading our scriptures brings God no closer, and our prayers ring hollow.

Sometimes our hearts are filled with the kind of complaints that concerned the two apostles on the road to Emmaus like them we are tempted to tell each other all the terrible things that have been happening to us in the last few weeks all of these things that so fill our minds that we fail once again to recognise Jesus

But small steps can lead us into the most incredible adventures and being a Christian is about acquiring a new allegiance, but that is not just a private matter between ourselves and God, there is also the new allegiance, whether we like it or not we are part of something bigger, we are setting out on the journey with a band of fellow pilgrims we are there to sustain support each, other just as Frodo's companions supported him in Tolkien's Lord of the rings.

Trying to be a Christian on our own is asking for trouble.

By following the steps that Peter has shown us of Repentance - Baptism – Accepting Forgiveness and Inviting the Holy Spirit into our lives. By following our calling to pray for our church, for our world, and for each other – to serve our community and as in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians informs us 'to practice breaking bread together, it is the quintessential expression of Christian fellowship a practical way of building community and an act of Remembrance of Jesus is death' 1 Corinthians 10:16 to17

Breaking bread is clearly something distinct from taking nourishment although both happened together in believers homes and both are expressions of our Christian fellowship.

As our apostles have seen the Lord, now they must share it with the others. Despite their tired legs, they return to Jerusalem. They go to the same house where earlier they had left their fear-filled friends. But now they are all awake, rejoicing and sharing the good news with one another.

"We have seen the Lord!" It becomes the most joyful refrain, whispered in amazement and then proclaimed in loud conviction. "We have seen the Lord!" Cleopas and his companion add to the chorus: "Yes, he was known to us in the breaking of the bread."

This week may I encourage you to take your own small steps on a shared adventure as apprentices of the apostles, students of the way and

May he be known to us also in the breaking of the bread.
Amen