



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

Someone once said that Jesus changed the world at 3 mph.

What they meant was, he walked everywhere. And as he walked, he talked and healed and encouraged and blessed.

If you traced his journeys on a map, they wouldn't make much sense. He was all over the place! He wandered across Palestine, led, I suppose, by the breath of the Spirit.

But some of his journeys were pilgrimages. He would go to Jerusalem for the major festivals.

Since then, Christian people, and people of all the great religions of the world, also go on journeys to their holy places to rekindle their faith and to get back in touch with that most basic reality of all, namely that life itself is a journey.

Though, actually, there is nothing particularly religious about this observation. We all know that the journey of life begins when we are born. We all know that it ends when we die. As we get older, we become increasingly aware that there is more road behind us than ahead of us. Such is the human lot.

But faith makes a difference. It teaches us that the journey of life that ends in death, can become a holy pilgrimage that leads through death into life with God.

This, of course, is the Easter message. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb on the first Easter morning with the intention of anointing a corpse. She found the tomb empty and the stone rolled away. She was the first person to encounter the risen Christ. She didn't recognise him at first – she thought he was the gardener – but she was actually face-to-face with a reality that is beyond the reality we usually see around us, and now it had come to meet her in the person of Jesus Christ.

The direction of her life was changed. Her life became a pilgrimage.

And so Christian people, and people of other faiths, and many other people of goodwill who just want to get in touch with some of life's more

basic realities, set out on pilgrimage. It is massively increasing in popularity. New pilgrim routes are opening up each year. I myself have walked to Canterbury and Walsingham and Glastonbury and York. I have walked the great Camino to Santiago de Compostela. In a few weeks' time I plan to walk St Cuthbert's way from Melrose to Holy Island.

And when I make these journeys, I remember that my life is a journey home. I learn how to travel light. I learn to appreciate what is around me and in front of me in every step. I learn to be more vulnerable to the people I meet and the things I see. I learn that I can't always choose my fellow travellers. That we're in this together. I learn to receive hospitality. I look to encounter God. In each step of the way I learn how to be led.

Walking even helps me think. It was Rousseau who once commented: "I can only meditate when I'm walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs!"

When we walk we inhabit the world differently. Rebecca Solnit puts it this way: "The mind, the body and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord."

We urgently need to learn how to tread lightly on the Earth and to live in greater harmony with our world and with each other. Neither can we do this on our own. We need each other and we need a vision that serves the common good.

So as our world re-sets, and as we, thankfully, pass beyond Covid, we need to learn how to think differently and to live more simply.

Perhaps going on pilgrimage would help us. Perhaps we all need to slow down to God's pace and change the world at 3mph.

Archbishop Stephen has written about walking to Santiago in his book Striking Out; Stories and poems from the Camino; and also about how we might inhabit the world differently in his most recent book, Dear England, Finding Hope; Taking Heart and Changing the World.

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