



On 9 June 2022 Archbishop Stephen gave the lecture at the annual Moule Day at Ridley Hall, Cambridge.

On 9 June 2022, the Archbishop gave the annual Moule Memorial Lecture, named in honour of C.F.D. "Charlie" Moule on the theme "Travelling Well: Pilgrimage and Discipleship". A text extract of this follows:

In 1986 just over 1,800 people walked the ancient, 1000-year-old pilgrimage to Santiago. We know this, because when you complete the journey, you get what's called a Compostela from the Pilgrims' Bureau. They check the stamps on your 'pilgrim passport,' verifying that you have walked at least 100km.

In 2016 – just forty years later – 300,000 people walked the Camino. Again, we know the figure from the compostelas issued. That year, I was one of them.

Each day when I set off I gave myself the happy task of writing a sonnet because I thought I've not got much else to do. It's about nine or ten hours of walking each day, in northern Spain, it's mountainous and it's hot, and I thought I'll compose a sonnet in my head each day and write it down in the evening. I did it just for my own pleasure. A sonnet is something you can get in your head and off by heart in the course of a day.

This is the one I wrote on Day 1:

These are the steps I'm taking today

1 – to learn the Spanish for 'Help, I'm lost'

2 – find out how much living lightly costs

3 – see if there's a way within a way

These are the steps I'm taking today

These are the trips I'm making today

1 – to think that contemplating self is prayer

2 – crave a helping larger than my share

3 – in this bright moment mourn yesterday

These are the trips I'm making today

So place each foot without regret or fear

If this is faith then there must be doubt

Some things are only learned by striking out

So make each breath a joyful gift of prayer

So when I got back from the Camino, nine parishes in the Diocese of Chelmsford where I was then serving, because I did this as part of my sabbatical, said, ‘Bishop, come and talk to us about walking the Camino.’ For the first time in my life I found myself somewhat lost for words. It had been such an incredible experience of refining and stripping away, and tremendous joy out of something that is pretty tough-going that I didn’t know what to say. So I turned to the poems I’d written, started reading them saying, this is what the walk seems to have done in me, these are the things I think I’ve learned.

So let me state the obvious: pilgrimage has become hugely popular in recent years. It’s big business. It’s on TV. It’s getting hard to find a Christian hasn’t walked to Santiago! And it’s not just Christian people. Pilgrimage has always been a hugely significant part of Islam and the Jewish faith and, indeed, most other faith traditions. And many of the people who walk to Santiago each year, and across all the other pilgrimage routes that are being rediscovered or newly opened across the world, do not call themselves religious – though they may well be spiritual - and walk for all sorts of other reasons, for health, wholeness, mindfulness, and particularly to reconnect with and visibly live lightly on the earth.

So, it seems to me that reflecting on the huge growing interest in pilgrimage, knowing that it is something that is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition is really important for our discipleship but also for our mission.

Let’s start with the obvious. A pilgrimage must be a journey before it is a destination. The little book of poems and stories I wrote a few years ago reflecting on my own Camino, begins with these words –

“We must be the first generation of Christians who think pilgrimage is about arriving rather than travelling.”

Moreover, the prologue to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, where we are told that to “pass the long journey (the pilgrims) told each other stories” concludes:

“I wouldn’t like you to think that I was looking forward more to the stories than to visiting the shrine of holy St Thomas but there is more to be said for pilgrimages than just seeing a holy place. You often meet such extraordinary people on the way.”

If you have seen the Martin Sheen film, The Way, the joy and the meaning of this journey comes from these encounters.

Throughout the Old Testament, the idea of journey/exodus is one of the central ideas of the narrative.

In the gospels we see Jesus going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. We see him seeking out lonely places. We see in the Acts of the Apostles the great missionary journeys that Paul takes.. This is deeply embedded in our tradition and needs to be rediscovered.

In the 1960s, a Japanese theologian called Kosuke Koyama, wrote a book, Three Mile an Hour God (SCM Press). He observed that the average speed that human beings walk is three miles per hour. Jesus, therefore, who is God, walked at three miles per hour. Love has a speed, Koyama says, and that speed is slow. That speed is gentle. That speed is tender.

Rebecca Solnit, a more secular pilgrim, makes a similar observation in her fantastic book Wunderlust –

“I like walking because it is slow, and I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour. If this is so, then modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought...”

And it was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who said –

“I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs.”

‘You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest awhile,’ says Jesus to his disciples. (Mark 6. 31). We disregard this call at our peril.

Today, places within the UK such as Iona and Lindisfarne receive over 150,000 visitors a year, Walsingham around 250 000 pilgrims, while Santiago de Compostela numbers its pilgrims in the millions, even if nowadays most of them arrive by bus, plane, or cruise liner. Other sites within the UK are developing opportunities for pilgrimage. And our cathedrals are also doing this.

And just last year young people who travelled to Glasgow for COP 26 called it ‘a pilgrimage’. They walked on the earth and in solidarity with the earth. Some of them were Christians, some of them weren’t, but they called what they were doing a pilgrimage. This pilgrimage called attention to the injustices and challenge of our climate crisis, making pilgrimage itself a form of prophetic witness, and a sign of God’s call to do justice and to love mercy.

And of course, the very first Christians weren’t called Christians but ‘followers of the way.’ And if I had another big point I’d want to make is that in terms of our discipleship and our mission, whether a rediscovery of the Christian life as following in the way, the rediscovery of our own understanding of ourselves as people of the way, might be one of the better ways of not just living our faith but commending it to others.

So, here’s my point. When you go on a journey, you have to slow down to God’s pace When you go on a journey you are reminded that the whole of your life is a journey. Our life begins when we are born, and ends when we die, and we journey from birth to death. However, when we introduce the idea of pilgrimage into the discourse and language about the Christian faith, we’re offering profound good news because now we are saying that the journey that we know begins with birth and ends in death, now is experienced and lived as holy pilgrimage. A holy pilgrimage to death not the ending but as the gateway to new beginnings – the great biblical vision, the new heaven, the new earth, the new humanity, the new creation.

When I walked to Santiago 6 years ago, this is what I learned about being a disciple of Jesus and following in the way.

I learned first that someone had been this way before me. Across the whole of northern Spain there are yellow arrows pointing you to Santiago.

Secondly I learned that you cannot choose your fellow travellers or your companions on the road.

If you are walking in the mountains in northern Spain and someone is alongside you, then unless you choose to stop or run ahead then they are your companion for the day.

This is such an important lesson for us to learn in the Christian life. I feel one of the tragedies of the Church is this idea that we can choose who our companions are. It doesn't say anywhere in the gospel 'love everybody'. What Jesus says is 'love your neighbour'. It is simply not within our gift to choose who our companions are. The elbow cannot say to the pancreas 'I don't need you'. I can choose whether I consider this person to be my brother or sister or not – that is within my gift.

Is there anything more important the Church needs to learn at the moment?

And I learned that there is a big and beautiful space between A and B, and that while in the rest of life I usually try to get between A and B in the quickest possible time by the shortest possible route, there is a spacious depth of loveliness in every moment and every footstep if you just find yourself forced to look, indeed to slow down to God's pace.

#### *A poem*

Between A and B there is a vast space, but  
with eyes on the road and a brisk pace you'll never see it.

It is warm and slow.

It finds the contours of the land  
and goes the same speed as you.

If you make your goal the destination  
then you'll never know how to travel well.

Oh, so much misery is heaped upon the world  
by those who move quickly  
and think only of the end.

Another way is waiting  
and all that it requires is what you've already got

time, candour and a sturdy pair of shoes.

Between A and B there is a space.

It is here and now, it is your life,

if you choose.

And I learned what enough looks like.

The guidebooks told me that if it were possible, I should try to ensure my rucksack weighed no more than 9 kg. Though they seemed to imply this would be difficult to do. I weighed mine the day before I set off and it came in at just over nine. I was pleased with myself, I was travelling light.

But let me also tell you that one of the most sobering things I learned was that I had too much stuff with me. I, for instance, took three pairs of socks and three pairs of knickers and three shirts, and I discovered I only needed two. Wash one, wear one. Wash one, wear one. That was the simplicity I discovered.

And so, I also learned what that line in the Lord's prayer - give us today our daily bread - that I've said so many times and never really understood, actually meant, 'Please give me, Lord, enough for today; and save me, spare me, stop me from wanting more than my share.'

Is there anything more important the world needs to learn?

And I learned how to receive the hospitality of strangers: so many acts of kindness that helped me on the way.

And I learned a vulnerability that, if I'm honest, I have never really experienced before in my life, for I am someone who has always known where the next meal is coming from and where I will sleep at night. With this taken away, not only was I dependent upon the hospitality of others, but I was also more open to them and, I suppose to God, that I'd ever been before.

And I learned a tremendous joy. I hope I hadn't been a miserable git before I set off, but the sum total of all my walking and all my learning was joy. And this was born out of the refining and stripping away of my life and my faith to the simple repetition of my footsteps and the rhythm of my beating heart, although it was enormously hard at times, and there were days when I wondered whether I would be able to make it,

And I learned again that I am one of those people who needs to move in order to be still. Rousseau said he could only think with his legs. I have found I can't really pray without mine.

All of this is hugely important for discipleship and evangelism today –

- knowing that someone has gone this way before you
- that you cannot choose your fellow travellers

- that we are sisters and brothers one to another, one humanity inhabiting one world
- appreciating each moment, each step, each heartbeat
- learning what enough looks like
- travelling light
- receiving the hospitality of strangers
- finding joy in vulnerability
- finding out how to pray

And to actually go on pilgrimage makes this very real.

It is therefore good for our discipleship.

In my experience it has also been a good way of sharing faith.

I walked to Walsingham twice as a curate, taking large groups of young people from south London.

In my first incumbency there were no young people in the church at all. I didn't quite know how to begin to develop some sort of youth ministry.

So, discovering there had been some children at the church, who were now teenagers and had lapsed away, I wrote to them and said I was planning to walk the ancient pilgrim way to Canterbury the following summer and would they like to join me. About seven or eight of them said yes and that summer we walked 150 miles from Chichester to Canterbury. Somewhere along the way, their hearts burning within them as they looked back, several of them came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Other pilgrimages to Glastonbury, Durham and York followed. Three of those young people are now ordained. Not that ordination is the gold standard of Christian discipleship. Far from it. But it does show what can happen, and how lives are changed.

Finally, there is one other sort of journey that we read about in scripture and that we haven't mentioned much today, and it may need to be the subject of another lecture on another occasion, but I am moved and inspired by the missionary journeys that the great apostle Paul made and wonder whether this is another model for ministry that we might want to look at a fresh in our own day. These were not pilgrimages that Paul made. His primary purpose in making the journey was to share the gospel and plant new churches. But he also encouraged the Christian communities that he encountered on the way and when he re-visited churches, he had planted himself.

When I was Bishop of Chelmsford and now as Archbishop of York, I am giving time each year to go on pilgrimage for the renewal of my own spiritual life and to put myself back in right perspective; and to make missionary journeys to share the gospel and encourage the church. You

may have questions about that – and other matters I've raised, but, for now, let me finish with the not terribly original observation, but true nonetheless, that wisdom comes on foot.

After I walked with those young people to Canterbury all those years ago and found such joy and meaning on the road, I was back in the parish the following week, and I bumped into a member of the congregation who said to me, 'It must be nice to be back in the real world'. I smiled, but inside I was crying out, 'This isn't the real world!'

The greatest joy of pilgrimage is to discover a different way of inhabiting this life that can then overflow into the whole of life and help us to discover that the whole of life is a journey home.

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