

James writes...

The invigoration of setting off on a journey



'By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out...' (Hebrews 11.8a)

It's that time of year when families are setting off on summer journeys. Term has ended, bags are packed and the allure of journeys and foreign parts (whether that's Norfolk or abroad!) awaits. Others may be travelling earlier or later, but we all recognise the excitement that setting-off brings. By the end of July (24th-28th), a group of our young people (led by Petra & myself) will have done likewise, setting off on pilgrimage to Lindisfarne. I can't wait! The excitement of travelling to special places, letting go, breathing the fresh air and exploring sacred sites is thrilling. As well as relaxing and exploring together, leaving the day-to-day behind we open ourselves to the possibility of change and fresh horizons. Maybe when we return life will be a bit different and the year ahead happier, wiser and more fulfilled. What do you hope for?

Setting off on a journey is also, for some, a kind of rite of passage. For Petra, it marks the end of her time as a curate at St John's, because a day after our return it is her last Sunday: 30th July. Please do join our special All Age Communion at 10am, Parish Lunch, and Choral Evensong at 6pm! I know there is so much to express gratitude to Petra for, as she has contributed so generously, creatively and caringly, over the past three years & during the vacancy in particular. So many have commented what an outstanding priest Petra is, how blessed we have been, and how fortunate Duxford is. Our trip to Lindisfarne marks a significant ending for Petra, as well as a time of spiritual transition to her new ministry. May God bless Petra abundantly in her ongoing ministry.

As I gear up to set off for Lindisfarne, and my summer holiday mid-August, I can't help reflecting on significant journeys in times-past, how they've shaped my faith. I remember leading my first parish (Birstall & Wanlip) on a seven day pilgrimage, on foot, to Lincoln (70 miles), in order to raise money for a mission-focused church re-ordering project. I also remember, eight years ago, going on sabbatical, and walking the St Cuthbert's Way (from Melrose to Holy Island), and being inspired by the Celtic saints. And, only six weeks ago, leading my ex-parish (Great Bowden) on pilgrimage, also to Northumberland, as I prepared to bid them farewell. Quite apart from the inspiration of our Celtic and Anglo-Saxon saints

(including St Aidan & St Cuthbert), setting off on such journeys reinvigorates our awareness of God's presence and vision of what Christian life could be. What is your vision of faith and of our shared vocation as the Body of Christ at St John's?

As a group of us prepare, later this month, to launch a year of 'strengthening the foundations' (a year of deepening prayer & spirituality), we look forward to fresh opportunities to journey at St John's – the idea of a pilgrimage to Ely has been mentioned! We anticipate a range of opportunities, whatever our age or context or lifestyle, to set-off afresh in our faith and prayer and discipleship, following Jesus, the traveller on the road. And as we do this, we look forward to listening to one another afresh, to deepening our friendship, to reaching out, and to beginning to discern the steps that God wants us to take into his future. After all we need to remind ourselves, as our sights are refreshed by summer journeys, that the church is less a building than a ship, called by God to set sail and be on the move, with all the possibilities of exciting new destinations. After all, if Abraham hadn't obeyed and set-off on his journey, the story of the people of God would be rather different.

Let me finish with words of reflection, a poem by Julie McGuiness, 'Reflections on Life's Road'. What ways are you going to travel, fully open to God's Spirit and daring to discover God's promptings?

Some people travel in straight lines:
Sat in metal boxes, eyes ahead,
Always mindful of their target,
Moving in obedience to coloured lights and
White lines,
Mission accomplished at journey's end.

Some people travel round in circles
Trudging in drudgery, eyes looking down,
Knowing only too well their daily, unchanging round.
Moving in response to clock and to habit,
Journey never finished yet never begun.

I want to travel in patterns of God's making:
Walking in wonder, gazing all around,
Knowing my destiny, though not my destination,
Moving to the rhythm of the surging of his Spirit.
A journey which when life ends, in Christ has
Just begun.

