**Sunday 22nd**

**September 2024**

**Proper 20 | Ordinary 25**

**The Revd Nigel Uden**

**Opening Words**

May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.

*Jude 2*

Like many seeking wisdom, consolation or hope,

perhaps we sometimes echo Samuel and say,

‘Speak Lord, your servant is listening.’

*I Samuel 3.9*

At such a time, may we also hear an echo of Isaiah:

And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left,

your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,

“This is the way (hodos); walk in it.”

*Isaiah 30.21*

**Approach**

Gracious God,

awaken us from sleep

that we may worship you

in Spirit and in truth;

through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen

*Worship: from the URC* 2003 page 3

**Adoration and Confession**

 Creator God, you are source, guide and goal of all that is and we praise you.

 Carpenter God, you are way, truth and life and we praise you.

 Companion God, you offer faith, hope and love and we praise you*.*

 We know and are sorry that we have too glibly spoken of you

 forgetting that you are the one without whom we would not be.

 We know and are sorry that we have too rarely walked in your way,

 grappled with your truth or made known your life in us.

 We know and are sorry that we have too cautiously entertained the Holy Spirit,

 and thus been shallow in faith, hesitant in hope and half-hearted in love.

 By your grace Creator, remake us,

 Carpenter, refashion us,

 Companion renew us,

 through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings**

*St Mark 9 30 - 37* | *St Luke 24.13-35*

**All Ages Talk**

Knowing the way to make something work is useful.

I remember my father getting agitated that he could not get a new lawn mower to work. He spent some time failing all sorts of ideas. My mother asked him if he had read the leaflet that came with it. He hadn’t. The best way to get something to work is to read the instructions.

I also remember going on holiday with a friend and his parents. The driver was famed for getting lost. The shortest of journeys might include what they called a DDD – Daddy’s Dreadful Detour. Just as my father didn’t look at the instructions for the mower, so this man didn’t read the map. The best way to reach one’s destination is to read the map.

There’s a clue here for our faith journey, too. One understanding of the Christian life is that it is about journeying towards God. But like Thomas, we don’t always know the way. And that’s where Jesus comes in. St John’s Gospel suggests that Jesus describes himself as ‘the way’. The way to God. In what he says to explain God’s wisdom, and in the example he sets to demonstrate God’s love, Jesus is the way to reach God.

And the best news of all, is that as we try to take the Jesus way towards God we will find that God is already on the way towards us, with welcome, acceptance and embrace.

It is indeed a thing most wonderful.

**Sermon Notes**

Theme: being on the Way

Text: Mark 9.33: ‘what were you arguing about on the way?’

There are all sorts of literal ways to be ‘on the way’:

* a daily walk for health;
* getting to work;
* approaching retirement, or of another life’s significant changes;
* the development of dementia;
* the ultimate journey into and beyond death.

Or there are metaphorical ‘ways’:

* a way of proceeding, or of doing something like ironing a shirt or mending a puncture;
* a way of behaving;
* discerning the way through a problem.

In the Bible’s Greek, ‘way’ = hodos, a feminine noun, and its derivatives

It is used repeatedly of literal journeys:

* Mark 9.33 – being on the road
* Acts 8.39 – after Baptism, the Ethiopian went on his way
* I Thessalonians 3.11 – the writer trusts God and Father, ‘and our Lord Jesus to direct our way to you’
* Genesis 30.36 (Septuagint) - the length of a journey, e.g. three days
* Luke 24.32 - the Emmaus Two tell of Jesus speaking with them, ‘on the way’

Hodos, way, is also used in the Bible more theologically:

* Psalm 1.1 – ‘Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, nor take the path that sinners tread’.
* Mark 1.3 – ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’
* John 14.6 – Jesus said, ‘I am the Way ...’
* Acts 19.9, 24.14 - followers of Jesus are people ‘the W ay’
* I Corinthians 12.31 – ‘the more excellent way’

In the evening of the first Easter Day, en route to Emmaus, the conversation takes the two disconsolate walkers on a faith journey. The one who draws near as they are on the way is first as stranger – they do not recognise him, but as he talks they find him to be a teacher – they earn from him, and warm to him, inviting him into their home, more of a friend – and as they share a meal, and he took, blessed and broke bread, they recognise him; he is Saviour.

It can seem that The Church in our part of the world has lost its way.

A sermon could discuss how people of/on The Way can get back on the road with Jesus, and journey with him, whether as stranger, teacher or friend, or Saviour. That nurtures us

* for an encounter with God, which both caresses and cajoles
* for an understanding of God, which fascinates and feeds
* for fellowship with God, which makes us whole and enrols us as partners in mission, and
* for trusting God for abundant life on both sides of the grave.

Wherever we are on the Way, Jesus Christ is with us, until he takes us home.

**Statement of Faith**

We believe in God,

from whom every family

in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in Jesus Christ,

who lives in our hearts through faith,

and fills us with his love.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in God,

three in one and one in three.

*inspired by Ephesians 3.14ff*

**Offertory**

God, we bring our gifts of money

and with them we offer ourselves –

all that we have and are.

We bring them

not to buy your love,

nor to earn your forgiveness,

less still to deserve your grace,

but as a thank offering,

and a sign of our commitment

to answer your love with our love,

in the church and in the world,

through Jesus Christ, Amen

**Intercessions**

Let us pray.

Gracious God, our companion on the Way,

whose Spirit helps us in our weakness and guides us in our prayers,

we pray for the Church and for the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

We pray for

*the church throughout the world,*

*its unity and sense of purpose as it serves God’s mission.*

Renew the faith and life of the Church,

strengthen its witness;

and make us one in Christ.

Grant that we and all who confess Jesus as our Saviour

may be faithful in service and filled with his Spirit,

and that the world may be turned to him.

We pray

*for the nations of the world,*

*for our own country,*

*and for all seeking reconciliation*

Guide the nations in the way of justice, liberty and peace;

and help them to seek the unity and welfare of humanity.

Give to all in authority wisdom to know and strength to do what is right.

We pray

*for people who are sick and suffering,*

*for victims of injustice,*

*and for people who are lonely and bereaved*

Comfort those in sorrow, heal the sick in body or in mind; and deliver the oppressed.

Give us active sympathy for all who suffer and help us

so to bear the burdens of others that we may fulfil the law of Christ.

We pray

*for our families, friends and neighbours*

*and for people we know who need our prayers.*

Keep us and our loved ones united in loyalty and love,

and always in your care;

and may our friends and neighbours, and all for whom we pray,

receive the help they need, and live in peace.

We remember those who have died.

Eternal God, accept our thanks and praise

for all who have served you faithfully here on earth,

and especially for those dear to our own hearts.

May we and all your people,

past, present and to come,

share the life and joy of your kingdom;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*based upon those in the URC’s A Book of Services 1980*

**Blessing**

Bless to us, O God, the earth beneath our feet.

Bless to us, O God, the path whereon we go:
we on your path, you in our steps.

God, be with us in every valley;

Jesus be with us on every hill;

Holy Spirit, be with us on

every stream,

every cliff edge,

every green pasture

every moor and meadow,

in the crest of the waves on the sea.

Every time we rest and every time we wake up;

God be with us every step we take. Amen

*A Prayer for the Journey inspired by Carmina Gadelica*

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| **Hymn Suggestions** |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Blessed city, heavenly Salem | 559 | 200 | 677 | 73 |
| Who Would True Valour See | 557 | 535 | 486 | 224 |
| When A Knight Won His Spurs | 556 |  |  |  |
| It is a thing most wonderful | 503 |  |  | 346 |
| I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Are | 501 | 455 |  |  |
| Give To Me Lord A Thankful Heart | 497 |  | 520 |  |
| O thou who camest from above | 433 | 625 | 564 | 525 |
| The Church of Christ, in every age | 636 |  | 415 |  |
| Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son | 247 | 419 | 313 | 689 |

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*