

Thought for the Day Luke 9.51-62

This passage of Scripture sees Jesus on his final journey to Jerusalem. He has already talked to his disciples about his impending suffering there, they have declared their faith in him as Messiah, and have seen him transfigured with Moses and Elijah. Despite all these things they are still unable to grasp what is about to happen and the horror of Jesus' last days.

Jesus has "set his face on Jerusalem". He is determined to get there no matter what. Nothing can distract him, nothing can make him turn from his path.

We hear that Jesus doesn't seem notice the Samaritans. This shows just how focused he is on his task to get to Jerusalem. This is what God's plan is for him and nothing can stop him. Mention of the Samaritans is significant, because throughout Scripture Jesus shines a light on the Samaritans, a light that is positive, a light of compassion. We know that Jews did not mix with Samaritans and Jesus' teachings about them, the most remembered, perhaps, being the Good Samaritan, has been a way of trying to break down barriers between neighbours; and yet now Jesus doesn't notice them, and they seem to ignore him. We don't know if they simply don't want to distract him, because he has his "face set on Jerusalem" or if it is more of an affront to Jesus.

In typical disciple fashion his followers leap to the assumption that it is the latter, perhaps easy for a race that doesn't hold another with regard, and they offer to rain down fire and brimstone on them. Jesus' response is to rebuke them. He tells them off for even thinking about so doing. Again we don't know whether he sees their offer as another distraction or if he is cross because they aren't acting with compassion towards another race, despite his teachings to do so.

Whatever the reason behind it they go to another village. As they are travelling along Jesus teaches his followers about how hard it is to follow him.

One disciple says to him that they will follow him wherever he goes. Jesus responds with the lovely description, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests. But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head".

As a nation we hold great store in having somewhere we can call home. I don't know if any of you have ever been homeless. No-one in my family has but our eldest daughter came very close a few years ago. A

single parent of two small children with complex needs, her landlord gave her notice to quit because he was selling all his properties. Due to her circumstances she kept getting rejected when seeking another home and became increasingly anxious that her children wouldn't have a roof over their heads. At the eleventh hour an agent understood her situation and negotiated with the landlord of a lovely little house, where they were happy for several years. It was a very stressful time for us all, but she had a safety net, us. Of course we wouldn't see them out on the streets. So many homeless people are there for complicated and difficult reasons, for some their family situations don't help.

In some cultures, travelling and not having a permanent home is simply the way of life. Many Irish Travellers still lead a wandering lifestyle, moving on together in families and communities. They are part of a handful of traditional nomadic communities still roaming the planet in small groups, often travelling with animals that are vital to their livelihoods. They work hard to keep their ancient cultural beliefs and behaviours alive, surviving against the odds of climate change and urban encroachment on their territorial lands, suspicion and discrimination. These communities include the Kochi people of southern and eastern Afghanistan, the Bedouin people of the Negev desert, the Sámi people, mostly in Scandinavia and about 2,000 in Russia, the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania, the Mongols of China, the Dukha of Mongolia, and the Gaddi shepherds throughout Himachal Pradesh, India.

Jesus' followers are usually described as coming from communities with homes, villages and towns, they are not wanderers by choice. Jesus' words here gives them directly a very clear message about how following him will change their worlds. He has no place to call home, they have to give up home to follow him.

So are they pilgrims or are they nomads? We understand the concept of pilgrimage, indeed some of have been on pilgrimages. Pilgrims are on a journey and this journey has a fixed end point. Jesus and his followers are journeying to Jerusalem, so in that sense they are pilgrims. But Jesus also knows that after his earthly ministry the apostles and others will also be sent out across the world to places they don't know, without a planned end point. They will go wherever the Spirit sends them. So in this sense they are nomads.

We, as Christians are pilgrims, we are travelling on a journey with an end point. That end point is the Kingdom of God. We have a sense of direction, we look forward to our final resting place with God, and we do all that we can to plough the straightest furrow to get there.

God also calls us to be nomads. To truly follow Christ we must listen to voice of God, to understand that we don't know all his plans for us. We have to trust that we too are sent out to do his work, whatever and wherever that may, wherever that may take us. Pilgrim and nomad, sometimes in fellowship with others, sometimes alone, just us and God.