

Journeying to Emmaus: a reflection and a rule of life

The concept of a Rule of Life is a tried and tested Christian practice. Although it has its roots in the monastic life, many Christians of all traditions, (including Anglicans) have found that adopting a simple 'rule' can be a valuable aid towards shaping and structuring their lives, enabling us to walk more closely with Christ. In offering this pattern for a rule of life to the people of the Diocese in Europe, and in encouraging individuals to adopt it we hope to help people live out more fully our Christian discipleship and to mark ourselves intentionally as members of communities desiring to be faithful to Christ through this particular Anglican Christian way.

Journeying, and especially journeying with God, is a motif embedded deep within the biblical and Christian tradition. It runs from near the beginning of the Bible to its close. We hear of the travels of Abraham and his descendants, of the wilderness wanderings of the people after the Exodus from Egypt, of the joyful pilgrimages made to Jerusalem for times of festival, of the anguished journey of the exiles who found – to their surprise – that God was still present with them in Babylon, followed by the ecstatic visions of the prophets who sang of the people's return. In the New Testament all four Gospels are presented in the form of a journey made by Jesus and his followers, initially in and around Galilee, but then as a kind of pilgrimage to Jerusalem itself to meet what awaited there. After the resurrection the tale of travelling continues as the Gospel moves out from Jerusalem, crossing eventually from Asia to Europe, to culminate in Paul's goal of reaching Rome. Even the mysterious final book of the Bible, the Revelation of John, seems to be framed as a journey of pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem.

Journeying is an essential part of the Christian life and Christian discipleship today. That is certainly true in our diocese, the Diocese in Europe. Many, probably most, of those who worship in our chaplaincies were not born in the place or even the country where they now reside. They have travelled to be there at some point in their adult life. Frequently our people may live at a considerable distance from the places where our worship is offered: journeys of two hours (or more) each way to attend Sunday service are not unusual, and are a mark of the faithfulness of those who undertake them. The sustaining of the common life of the diocese requires extensive travelling on the part of some, especially our bishops and archdeacons. Our geographical location which encompasses lands where the gospel travelled in the earliest Christian centuries acts as an honoured reminder of the importance of journeying. We might reflect on the significance that the book of Acts suggests that the Gospel was first brought to Europe because Paul had a vision of a man who beseeched, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' (Acts 16.9) Historic Christian pilgrimage sites – Rome and Santiago and several others – are located in lands to which our diocese stretches. One of the most pressing contemporary issues that many in our diocese are seeking to respond to is the need to offer appropriate support to those who have recently travelled as migrants to this continent of Europe.

The physical actuality of our journeying can act as a sort of sacramental sign of our need, obligation and privilege of journeying with God. (It is no accident that the discipleship course recently produced by the Church of England goes by the name 'Pilgrim'.) Journeying is therefore an especially appropriate image for us here in the Diocese in Europe to draw on as we seek to develop a rule of life for the faithful people of our diocese, a rule of life which might echo also priorities for our chaplaincies. Such a rule is not intended to be detailed or over prescriptive, which would not work in all the varied circumstances experienced by our people. Rather it seeks to offer a gentle and tentative reminder of the different facets that our journey with God needs to draw on.

Among the many biblical stories which speak on journeying, the description of Jesus' encounter with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and their realisation in the course of a meal that they were meeting with the resurrected Lord, has a specially cherished place in the Christian imagination. It reveals to us some eternal truths, 'It is a parable of the life of the post-Easter Church, walking with Christ down the long road of history and knowing him in the Word and in the breaking of bread.'¹ It can speak powerfully to us, both as individuals and as Christian communities, about the transforming power of the resurrection, about joy and grief, exhilaration and weariness, failure and success, about memory of the past and hope for the future. So we have linked our suggested 'rule of life' to aspects of the story of the road to Emmaus.

¹ Maria Boulding, *Gateway to Resurrection*, p.45

Here are four suggested areas in which our Rule can resource God's people as they journey in the life of faith. It needs to encourage us to:

- Know God
- Grow in Christ
- Build community
- Live beyond ourselves.²

To explore each of these in a little more detail and link them to the Emmaus encounter:

Knowing God

The heart of the Emmaus story takes place when Jesus 'took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him.' (Luke 24.30) The disciples' recognition of Jesus occurs in the course of an act of worship. There are many different ways of knowing God and growing in such knowledge. However, a willingness to take part in worship with other Christians, to receive Christ in the sacraments, and a readiness to make this a regular priority of life, is fundamental.

Growing in Christ

As the disciples travel down the road in the company of the mysterious stranger, 'he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures'. Later that evening, when they have realised who he is they acknowledge to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' (Luke 24.27, 32). The journey of discipleship with Christ is a journey of learning, discovery and growth. Such growth should have several aspects to it. It would certainly include exploration of scripture and the fundamental resources of the Christian tradition. Resources from the aptly named *Pilgrim* series would be useful for this purpose. 'Growing in Christ' would also include the growth that comes through exploring the different dimensions of the life of prayer.

Building community

A crucial moment in the story comes when the disciples invite Jesus to stay with them as evening arrives. 'They urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."' (Luke 24.29) The word translated as 'urged' is strong: the offer of hospitality by the disciples is heartfelt and genuine, far from a conventional gesture that they half hope will be refused! The implication of the story is that there is a real and intrinsic connection between this act of welcome and the disciples' recognition of the resurrected Christ being present with them. At every eucharistic celebration we recognise the presence of the Risen Christ in our communities, the Christ who invites all of humanity into reconciliation with God, which is the very heart of our mission. Hospitality is one aspect of community building: hospitality, both given and received, is an essential part of the life of the church in our diocese. A culture of welcome is an important, though not the only, way that Christian community can be built. To find ways consciously and positively to contribute to the building of community, both among Christians and within wider society, is an important commitment required of Christ's disciples. It will require sacrificial offering of time, money, skills and talents.

Living beyond ourselves

The climax of the biblical account comes when the disciples race back to Jerusalem to share their news, a considerable effort since the geography means that it would have been uphill all the way! 'Then they told what had happened on the road, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread'. (Luke 24.35) 'Living beyond ourselves' could mean different things in different geographical and personal contexts. It might depend on whether a person is in paid or professional or voluntary work, whether they are a student, retired, or with family responsibilities. At its heart 'living beyond ourselves' means sharing with others something of the fire, of the transformation we have experienced through our own journeying with Christ. It could involve us sharing our joy in the Gospel with those outside the Christian community; it could mean a commitment to work with a variety of others for the wellbeing of our world; it could mean seeking to build bridges between our work and our faith. Its ultimate aim, as is the aim of any rule of life as a whole, is to enable us to share in glorifying God, and to savour the joy offered by Jesus Christ in opening to us the life of God the Holy Trinity.

² These categories are drawn from a model for church life developed in the Anglican Diocese of Auckland, New Zealand. Details have been slightly adapted.

A Rule of Life for the Faithful of the Diocese in Europe

Purpose: To enable us to share in glorifying God the Holy Trinity.

Knowing God: To commit ourselves to regular participation in an act of worship.

Growing in Christ: To commit ourselves to regular prayer and intentional study of our faith, and where possible to seek guidance from another (a 'spiritual director') to resource us as we seek to journey with Christ.

Building community: To offer time, treasure and talents to work constructively with our fellow Christians in building community within the church and in the places where we live.

Living beyond ourselves: To seek purposefully to find a specific way or ways to relate our faith to the wider world in which we have been placed by God our Creator.

A Diocesan prayer

Jesus our Way, Lord of the journey,
Surprising stranger of the Emmaus Road,
Guide to the spacious welcome of your Father's home,
Companion both of our sorrows and our joys.
We thank you for these lands in which we are both guests and hosts.
Walk together with us,
Enabling us to be true signs of your presence.
Stretch our hearts and minds and spirits,
Open our eyes and set our hearts on fire with love for you,
To share with you in transfiguring this cherished world,
For your honour and glory. Amen.