

ENCOURAGING JOURNEYS OF FAITH – Sunday, 1st March 2026

A prayer to start: Heavenly Father, may these words be your words, to your Glory. Amen

When did you last have a lightbulb moment? A penny dropper? In the interests of keeping warm, please put your hand up if you've had such a moment in the last 10 years, about anything!

One such moment I remember well was in the first module 'Mission and Ministry' of the Bishop's Certificate course, in Autumn 2022. The module was led by Andy Wooding-Jones, then Archdeacon of Rochester. And he explained clearly, and for me memorably, that 'Mission' is about God's mission to his world and to all his people; we are here in this place at this time to play our part in God's mission. To be God's hands and feet here.

And that made me look entirely differently at all sorts of things:

1. How we approach mission – the burden of responsibility was lifted because this is God's work, not our burdensome responsibility.
2. It created a freedom to take risks for God's mission, knowing that He will forgive us if things don't work out.
3. It encouraged prayer to seek God's will for us individually and collectively as a church.
4. It created excitement and joy because we are part of an enormous project rather than merely a lonely island.

I'm sure I was late to the party to start to understand this, but I think it's worth sharing my experience. My journey has been shaped too by involvement as a trustee of the Ugly Duckling Charity, a Cristian Charity which produces resources for early mission, in other words engagement with people at the very start of a journey of faith, probably with no faith background; people who ask: 'There must be more to life than this'. To which the answer is: 'You're right, there is; let's have a conversation and see where it might lead'. And part of our contribution to that conversation is telling our story authentically. Stories matter; they are real and they say who we are. The Ugly Duckling Charity created the Resolve Course we have used three Januarys running, and they provide the Table Talk coasters we put out at the Connect Café. The common thread in all their resources is that they create opportunities for conversation, in which there is a Christian voice. And leave the rest to God.

So conversations with people we meet are key opportunities to sow seeds but to leave it to God to do the watering. I suspect that if we all think back, there will have been particular people we have met, particular conversations we have had, which have been significant. Which have sown a seed in us, which may have taken years to germinate. And we will have sown seeds similarly. But we need to remember that years for us are but the blink of an eye for our eternal God.

It's time to look at the scriptures we have read this morning. I chose these because both talk about journeys of faith, but in different contexts. I hope they will help us to reflect on our own individual journeys and to understand how communication and conversation are so hugely important to encourage journeys of faith.

Let's start with Psalm 23, a Psalm often read at funerals because of the calmness and reassurance of its message. It tells a whole life story in six verses; a story of trust in the Lord (the Lord is my shepherd) who will provide (I lack nothing – he prepares a table before me).

An intensely personal journey of faith which faces the reality of life; the psalmist walks through the darkest valley and yet fears no evil because “you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me”.

And even with enemies around, the Lord lays a table and anoints with oil the head of the psalmist, whose cup overflows.

And all this is in the first person; an intimate journey of relationship and faith throughout the challenges of life for the psalmist, who, has the confidence to say:

Surely I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

What a great encouragement this psalm is for our personal journeys of faith.

And in the passage we read from Luke's Gospel, Luke relates the story, after Jesus' death and resurrection, of two of Jesus' followers who were walking to Emmaus. These two followers were joined on the road by Jesus who walked and talked with them. But the two followers do not recognise Jesus.

Our passage today picks up the story as the three of them approach Emmaus. Jesus makes out that he is walking further, but the two followers persuade him to stay. Jesus breaks bread, and his followers suddenly recognise him. And he disappears immediately from their sight.

We hear about their wonder: 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

But I'd like to look more closely at what these two followers did next.

They returned at once to Jerusalem, found the eleven and, Luke reports:

'Then the two told what had happened on the way'.

Let's look at those words and see how they enable us individually and as a church to encourage journeys of faith.

When we meet people and start a conversation this is what we do – we tell people what has happened on the way – on the journey we have had through life. And all our journeys are different but those life journeys have brought us all here, to worship our Lord together, to break bread together. And our work for God's Kingdom here is to tell others what has happened on the way – what has happened on our way. And to engage and interest people into thinking 'Maybe this is something I'd like to find out about'. So that is a start of a journey for them and they can then tell others what has happened on their way.

This is all underpinned by the personal journey we have as written by the Psalmist in Psalm 23.

But I leave with you to take away and reflect on and to talk about: What has happened on your way?

In fact, I invite you to treat this as a challenge today, in the following way. After today's service, try to find someone that you don't know particularly well, or don't know at all, and tell them your story about why you're worshipping here and what brought you to this point, and listen to their story as they do the same. You may think that your story isn't important, but it's so, so important. It's a story unique to you, and God loves you for it, loves you simply for being you. How encouraging is that!!

Amen