

Preached by Canon Andrew Tuck

Do you ever find a tune that gets stuck in your head? It just goes round and round and you just can't get rid of it. The tune that has been going round my head this week has been "Mud mud glorious mud" I can't think quite why, maybe it's because it's Glastonbury time and of course years ago Glastonbury was justly famous for being rained out and all the fields of Worthy Farm were turned to one glorious mud bath.

I remember our daughter was very excited about going to Glastonbury and then getting a call "Please come and rescue me!" Unfortunately neither Angela nor I were free to go and collect. However, the very kind husband of a churchwarden drove all the way from Farnham to Glastonbury to pick up two very bedraggled teenage girls!

The song "mud mud glorious mud" ends with the words "follow me follow me down to the hollow" and here comes the link with today's gospel reading. It is of course all about following. Following Jesus not to the hollow but to Jerusalem.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. We shall hear a lot about that journey over the next 5 months in fact right up until Advent just four weeks before Christmas. Each week the Gospel readings from chapters 9-19 of St Luke's Gospel tell stories and parables of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. What it means to make

that journey ourselves not literally to Jerusalem but our journey through life.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the Jews living in Galilee like most ancient peoples were not regular travelers. But with one exception the Jews did regularly make one journey the pilgrimage to Jerusalem it was about a 3 or 4 days walk. On that journey like all Jews, wherever they lived, they would tell the story of the great journey of the Exodus, the story of their deliverance from captivity into freedom, the story of the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Luke has all this in mind as he tells us about Jesus' plans to go to Jerusalem where he was to fulfill his exodus. His journey via his ministry, passion, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

Jerusalem is now his goal and Jesus is constantly on the move moving towards that goal where his work on earth will be completed.

It's interesting that Luke's other great book The Acts of the Apostles also includes a long travel sequence. The journeys of Paul eventually arriving in Rome. So traveling in obedience to God's call is one of Luke's central pictures of what it means to be a Christian. Following Jesus is what it's all about.

So what about following those paths that lead into the mud? I suppose we could all give personal examples of that, there is a

long list of muddy routes in today's first reading :- strife anger factions jealousy.the list goes on and on - but what about the bigger picture - what about nations, groups, movements political parties misleading others into very muddy waters.?

We saw that in the United States in Dec 2020 when Donald Trump refused to admit that he had lost his presidency. We see it today with gun laws being overturned and draconian laws affecting women being imposed with the overthrow of the Roe v Wade judgement. And we are seeing it in Russia today with Vladimir Putin ruthlessly suppressing any criticism of his Ukraine invasion.

I suppose the most obvious danger or being misled is when a country's political party allows it's leader to continue even though they know they do not tell the truth they cannot be trusted.

We need to be aware of these dangers in the life of our own nation. History teaches us that populism which is on the rise in our own nation, is dangerous because it offers so-called easy solutions to complex problems.

So three cheers for our bishops who said how immoral it was for the government to send desperate asylum seekers landing on our beaches by putting them on a plane to Rwanda.

So what does it mean to follow Jesus? It's clearly not easy unless you are a Christian fundamentalist and that can lead you into all sorts of extreme behaviour with dire consequences.

Today's gospel tells us that the followers of Jesus have to learn two things. First there needs to be a change of heart, a transformation in the way we think about the world and others.

And secondly Jesus sets the bar very high in terms of what he expects from those that follow him. And why is the bar set so high?

Because God's kingdom has a different set of values to that of the world. The world has messed up as one commentator has said our minds need rewiring.

James and John's minds had not yet been rewired, they want to do the same as Elijah in the Old Testament. They want to call down fire from heaven and destroy the Samaritan village. But that's not what Jesus's journey is like. It's not a triumphant march it is the progress of the good news -of god's kingship the gospel of the kingdom. And that good news is a message of love so strong that many find it so wide ranging and so surprising that many will find it shocking.

Today's reading ends with two persons who think it would be a fine thing to follow Jesus they want to follow but have conditions attached. Let me first bury my father - let me say goodbye to my family. They are very reasonable and responsible requests. I imagine we would have said the same if only Jesus had said "OK, do that then come and follow me" But he doesn't, and we too will probably find his response shocking. "Let the dead bury their own

dead“ Jesus challenges them to move forward. And that’s the point moving forward on our journey and with God’s grace living our lives which are by God's grace are being transformed - being rewired.

And so the question is: Where is Jesus asking us to travel as individuals as a parish as a nation.?

And are we ready to follow him? Are we up for it ? The going will not be easy on our road to Jerusalem - our Exodus journey. It will certainly get muddy. But please God and with God’s help we will not allow ourselves to wallow in the mud.