

I wonder if walking has become part of your lockdown resource kit, as it has for so many? When other outlets have been restricted walking can offer an opportunity for much needed exercise, a change of scenery, fresher air, and a boost to well-being.

Travelling in warmer climes I've been aware that as the sun starts to decline an evening ritual begins; the evening stroll as the air starts to cool. Sometimes this is along a sea hugging promenade like La Corniche in Beirut or along pedestrianised main streets in Sorrento. From the youngest family members in pushchairs to the oldest members of the community perhaps taking in the sight from a cafe table...this is the time to enjoy the pleasant cooler hours; to see and be seen.

You may recall that one of the first metaphors given in the bible to describe our relationship with God is that of walking; walking which facilitates encounter. Genesis 3:8 says:

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

It's the image of a stroll in a perfect Eden, in the cool of a day.

But this time a fracture is evident. Something is out of step in paradise. A compulsion to hide from God replaces the evening encounter of seeing God and being seen, knowing God, and being lovingly known.

Instead humanity hides, has chosen its own path, and it seems, loses its way along the way. In the metaphorical story of Genesis, not long after that parting of ways comes the first devastating consequence of being out of step with God: a brother kills his own brother. Out of step with God and out of step with one another.

In Jesus though we find God walking, not away from humanity but towards us, to help us find our way again. To do so he took a most costly path which would lead him to the cross.

This coming Sunday will be Palm Sunday when we will recall the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Come Thursday we will remember that in another garden, not Eden but Gethsemane, Jesus knelt and wrestled in prayer. There he chose to walk the final sections of his path, through the valley, even the valley of the shadow of death. The next day, that which we call Good Friday Jesus would be led through the streets of Jerusalem. The route he is traditionally said to have taken being known as the Via Dolorosa. His path of sorrows, of suffering which brought us home to joy.

Lent is a time when we are invited to reflect on the path that is our life, as individuals, as a church, as a wider community. As we draw close now to Holy Week might we pause to consider the ways in which the paths we have chosen to align, or otherwise, with the path God would call us along. If we should find that we have wandered off in the wrong direction, along the wrong path, now is a moment of great possibility, to make a course correction and re-join the companion who shows us the way? Having a map to trace out the journey is so helpful, having signs and way-marking symbols along the way is also a boon, but nothing really beats walking with a companion who knows the way.

The prayer chosen for this fourth week of Lent was written by Palestinian women from Jerusalem. In it they address Jesus who walked the soil and the city streets of the Holy Land.

As Holy Week approaches and we recall its events, the prayer of these women is that we would not be mere bystanders and onlookers but would walk, watch, and wait with Christ.

Go into the world walking the path of God.

Go into the world walking the way of the cross.

Go into the world filled with the Spirit.

Amen