

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Luke 9. 57-62)

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So much of Luke's gospel takes place 'on the road'. At the time this dialogue occurs, Jesus and his disciples have not long come down from the mountain of the Transfiguration, and Jesus has twice told his friends that he must be betrayed into human hands, though they do not understand him. He has, Luke says, 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9.51) and as they go along the road, there erupts this little cluster of interchanges – about following, about delaying, about turning back.

As you know, the prospect of journeying, going 'on the road' has been looming large for me the last little while. I am about to set out on pilgrimage – to walk the Way of St James. For over a thousand years, pilgrims have journeyed by various routes to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain, the legendary burial place of St. James the apostle of Jesus. In the year 815, as the story goes, a hermit was led to the grave by shimmering, miraculous lights referred to as the field of stars – *campus stellae*. The bones were identified by the gourd and scallop shell that the apostle always carried. To this day, the scallop shell is worn as the symbol of this pilgrimage. A church was built over the tomb, now a grand cathedral famous for its giant swinging censor, and this is the destination of the pilgrim walk.

We hope to arrive in the cathedral on about the 24th of October, a journey of 12,000km from Canberra, the last 800km being on foot from Southern France. From there, we will journey on a further 100km to the Atlantic coast, to a windswept headland called Finisterre, 'the end of the earth'. At this point, the known path ends;

ahead stretches the vast and trackless ocean. To continue from here, as the pilgrimage surely does, the wayfarer must learn a new way of treading, and this process of allowing the way itself to change and to change you as it takes you beyond your 'old ways' is of the essence of pilgrimage. The word 'pilgrim' comes from the Latin '*peregrinus*' which means 'foreigner' or 'wanderer'. An even older derivation of the word has its roots in the Latin '*per agrum*', meaning '*through the field*'. This ancient image suggests a curious soul who walks beyond known boundaries and familiar paths, drawn by a destination which is created by the journey: 'pilgrim there is no road, the road is made by walking', writes the Spanish poet Antonio Machado.

In our gospel reading today, we see Jesus calling those who would follow him onto this kind of road, this kind of journey – to Jerusalem, yes, but what that destination will mean for each of them is as yet unknown, and how the path will change them cannot be imagined. What makes this call, what makes any true pilgrimage a profound spiritual practice and a way of transformation, is that it requires this whole-hearted, whole-body, whole-person commitment. There's not a bit of you that is left behind, safe from the rigours and risks of the journey, able to pull out or hit the eject button, when the journey gets tiring, frightening, disorienting, painful or just plain boring. Once you are on the way, you are on the way – and the only way out is through, even if it looks, for a time, as though the journey has been suspended by failure, or defeat, or betrayal.

And in this sense, pilgrimage is not only a metaphor for life, it *is* our life in microcosm. Once our lives have begun, we are on our way – and the only way out is through. Although for some of us, the temptation to pretend that we can stand back and observe our lives, or pull out when we want to, or delay our departure, is profoundly seductive, in fact all that hedging is an illusion. The only choice is to give yourself whole-heartedly to the journey or not; the only choice is to decide the direction you will face, and the company you will keep. Jesus challenges those who would travel

in his company, who would go where he is going to the Father, to be clear about that choice and to give themselves to it wholly as he has. Pilgrimage is another word for incarnation – enfleshing, embodying, the way that is ours to go. And ultimately, this is what being a disciple of Jesus means – nothing held back, full immersion (think of baptism), letting go and entrusting yourself to something bigger – the Way, the silence, the promise, the call. It is always an act of faith, leading us where we do not fully know. Except that Jesus goes with us and takes us home to God.

A Litany of Walking

Walk -

Alone with others

Thou thyself, thy rival

Thou thyself finding thy companions

Thou thyself seeing thy enemies

thou thyself making thy brothers.

Walk -

Thy head knows not where thy feet take thy heart.

Walk -

Pilgrim of the world.

Walk -

Thou art born for the way.

Walk -

Thou hast an appointment.

Where? With whom?

Walk -

Thy steps, thy words

The road, thy song

the fatigue, thy prayer

And thy silence finally, thy speech.

Walk -

thou art born for the way

That of pilgrimage

That other way leading to thyself

and thy quest.

Walk -

So that thou may find

at the shrine at the end of the world

Thy peace

Thy joy.

Walk -

Already, God walks with thee.