

Over this season of Trinity our Old Testament Lessons have been drawn from the first two books of the Old Testament, Genesis and Exodus. It has been the story of a journey, beginning with Abram's call to leave his native land and travel to the land of Canaan. We have followed that story, the story of Abram, Isaac, Jacob, a very human story involving human strengths and frailties, times of faithfulness, times of failure. We've followed the story of the captivity of the people in Egypt and their deliverance. Today we read of their arrival at Sinai and the giving of the Law. They will journey on from there towards the Promised Land.

The passage from Philippians, picks up on this theme of journey as Paul speaks of his own personal journey from Pharisee and persecutor of the Church:

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. *Phil 3:12*

He speaks of his own personal pilgrimage of faith, in journey with Christ, a journey into Christ. This is not a finished venture, like the people heading for the Promised land he has further to go, further struggles to face – but he does so in the assurance of Christ's presence along the way, Christ's presence drawing him on.

We have been on something of a journey. It all began that fateful Sunday morning with the sound of slates sliding off the roof and we realised that we had got to the point where more than patching up was required. What was

involved? How much would this cost? Initial estimates for simply reslating the roof came to over 200K.

At that time, you may recall, the financial crash had just happened. Then someone asked ‘How do you eat an elephant?’ – to which the answer is ‘In small pieces.’

We set about eating the elephant, piece by piece. People took extra envelopes, made generous donations, organised events. Now we find ourselves having eaten the elephant – in fact a much bigger elephant than we initially anticipated as we realised that we would have to deal with more than just the slates – work has been done on the drainage, the upper windows, on stonework, enhancing our lightning protection. Next Sunday we go back into the Church. We can be justifiably proud of the way we have secured the fabric of St Mary’s for future generations.

Like the people at the foot of Mount Sinai, this is not the end of our journey. We go on in the light of what we have experienced as we continue our journey with Christ and into Christ.

What have we experienced? First of all, there has been the experience of a lifting of a load. In the past, when people have suggested significant expenditure, we have had to say – ‘Let’s get the roof out of the way first.’ Well the roof is now out of the way and the Vestry over the coming months

will begin the process of setting priorities for future expenditure and investment.

We have worshipped for the last five months in this Parish Centre – and isn't it great we had it? Many I know were anxious as to how this would work and there were fears that our attendances would go down. This has not been the case – in fact this has by and large been a very positive experience. There has been a greater sense of togetherness and with that an enhancement of our hymn singing – there has been no change in the nature of the hymns that have been chosen – people do sing out when they are surrounded by others who are singing. I am concerned that if we head back to our old seats then the quality of our hymn singing will deteriorate and we will lose something special. I know for many, they look forward to returning to receiving communion at the rails – they feel less rushed, more reflective. What I will very much miss is celebrating communion with people much closer to me – I am not looking forward to going back to stand in lonely isolation in the sanctuary – there is no reason why we cannot have reception at the rails combined with a lessening of the gap between the congregation and the communion table and this is something I would like to explore in the months to come.

There is one immediate solution to the diminishing of hymn singing and the gap between the communion table and the congregation and that is for people to sit closer to the front. I appreciate that we all have our favourite pew – could I repeat the suggestion I made in the Newsletter that people adopt as 'their pew' one that is four or five rows forward from where they now sit. I will

leave that with you – it would be a pity to lose that sense of togetherness, it would be a pity if at the 11 o'clock service we were to lose our hymn singing.

So we prepare to move out from here and back into our Parish Church to continue our journey of witness and worship. We give thanks to God who accompanies us along the path of life; the God who has been worshipped on this site for over 200 years and will be in the years to come by generations yet unborn. In fellowship with those who have gone before us (and I'm conscious of those who, unknown to us were buried in our grounds for over a thousand years) let us press on in our journey with Christ, and into Christ that his name may be glorified and his kingdom advanced in the years to come.