

Luke 9:51-62

On the move

Broad vision

It was often the case that young people were given scope to spread their wings, to have fun, explore, to find themselves and get a sense of what there was in the world, what life might have to offer them before “settling down”. There was a bit of that, though I suspect that for quite some time now the burden on youngsters not just to stick in at school but to cope with the huge pressures that modern society throws at them – pressures from the internet as well as from peers to become sucked into life changing, even life threatening pursuits has become huge (and much greater than most of us were accustomed to in our youth). I sense too, that many young people have a greater sense of responsibility for the big international issues that face us (and especially them) – climate change, world poverty, international disputes, wars, energy and food security and much more. In some ways the idea of “settling down” seems so much more difficult, almost surreal. Is it reasonable to contemplate putting down roots and settling in when so much in the world is uncertain, transitory and anything but secure? And yet, deep down you sense that young people are as concerned about well-being and security and the future as the rest of us – but often theirs is far less insular and individual than ours. Their horizons are wider, they are far more likely to see the issues as global, as impacting on the planet not just what is going to happen here. Yes, there might be an immediacy, a very down to earth personal concern about what they are going to wear for the leavers’ dance or who is going with whom – or whether ANYONE cares for them – but scratch the surface and they have very real concerns about the future of the planet, about ending poverty, war, homelessness and improving the lot of everyone who is up against it. Settling down will seem like a distant dream, perhaps an impossible dream, so let’s allow them scope to think big, to think globally, to strive after the impossible – world peace, climate and food security, to be possible. Let’s be open to having our own horizons broadened too – we need to listen to young people. The verses from Acts 2, Pentecost, speak of the young having visions and the elderly, dreams. It is important that we allow our youngsters to have vision for the future (and for God to be part of their experience) but so too, older generations need to retain a freshness and vision for what God has in store for them – and perhaps some of the vision and dreams of God’s future might come from the insights and ambition of our young people. Are we sufficiently in tune with one another? How could we better relate among the generations to provide one another (and the world and the kingdom) with a better future? These are down to earth practical questions, but the answers we come up with could have a significant impact for the kingdom.

On the move

Jesus was spreading his wings a bit too. In this passage from Luke chapter 9 we see him away from the familiar setting of Galilee, visiting a Samaritan town which offered him a less than cordial welcome, when they found that Jesus was heading to Jerusalem. As many of you know, there were deep seated tensions between Jews and Samaritans for reasons steeped in history, but, as with so many modern disputes, sometimes the original reasons are dim and distant and

all that remains is an antipathy which is real, inherited but beyond the ability of most to explain. Some of the more impetuous of Jesus' followers are affronted and ask whether they should call down fire from heaven to destroy the town. Unsurprisingly, Jesus resists – his priority is always that love might triumph. While we may not entreat God to rain fire down on our opponents, we may need to take a leaf out of Jesus' book and learn to be far more understanding and patient with those who have a different outlook to life (and even to mission) than do we. But he was on the move in another sense: there was an urgency about him – he sensed his time was limited. He wanted to reach out to as many as possible with the good news and frankly wasn't bothered with social conventions or historic religious scruples. He had few ties. No home or family to speak of and while he had largely confined himself to Galilee to date, he was moving out, travelling light, he needed to be "on the go". And so, he called on others to join him – like the Son of Man to have no roof over their head but to be free and unhindered to journey with him and take the good news of the kingdom far and near. That can be an uncomfortable message to hear – for most of us have all sorts of ties – home, family, perhaps work that would make it hard for us to respond – are we destined to be failures as disciples – or destined to be second class believers? Hold that thought for a moment but try not to worry – we'll come back to it in a few moments. Let's give a little more thought to what Jesus has to say about the excuses people make for NOT following him – (that might make things WORSE for us, before they get better!) One man said that he had to bury his father. Jesus' reply seems incredibly heartless to us: let the dead bury their own dead. Ask yourself – can you really imagine Jesus being so uncaring towards someone who had just been bereaved? No? I can't either. There's no way that a loving and caring, kindly Jesus would have said this to a man on his way to his father's funeral. It must have meant something else. It was an excuse – nothing less, nothing more. One commentator suggested that the man might have had prospects of inheriting from his father some way down the line, and he needed to "keep in with him". Whatever the facts of the case might be let's be clear that Jesus would have treated the man quite differently had he really been recently bereaved. This was excuse – and Jesus wasn't impressed! Jesus was offered another excuse – first let me go and say goodbye to my family. Had that been all there was too it, I have little doubt that Jesus would have been perfectly happy for him to return home to say goodbye to his family – and perhaps ask for their prayers. So, again this was simply an excuse. Taking an hour to head home and say goodbye to the family would not have been the end of the world nor would it have harmed the advance of the gospel – indeed, it would have been a very loving and caring response to make – so once again, although while initially it might have sounded plausible – it was another excuse – and Jesus wasn't impressed. And yet, did you notice that when another believer was very upfront with his commitment "I will follow you wherever you go" Jesus didn't rush to accept his offer, instead he made it plain that following him would be tough – there would be hardship and difficulty. Discipleship is more than a walk in the park! So, where are we in all this? How are we to respond? Are we up for the challenge? Would we be fit for it? Or indeed are those the right questions. Jesus is on the move, but are we?

Together in mission

We are accustomed to people being picked on merit – and so, while it might disappoint us, it won't altogether surprise us that we weren't and aren't picked for everything we might have

liked to have done in life. We understand that there are selection criteria and processes – we're not in line to compete in the 2024 Olympic games in Paris; nor should we expect to be cast as 007 in a future Bond movie. But you never know – David Tennant became Dr Who and his dad was a Church of Scotland minister! The trouble is that we can become so used to people being picked on merit we carry that forward into matters of faith. We tend to assume that God picks those who have most going for them – and WE are not in that group! Whereas it's actually the other way round – God calls those whom he wants to carry out his work – and he equips them for the task. The fact is that he calls ALL of us to share with him in his mission and he equips ALL of us to play our part in it. It's not a matter of us failing qualification or not coming up to scratch. God calls us – and if he needs us to do something for him then he is well able to fit us for that. Remember, nothing is impossible for God. That means that if God is calling us to do something – even if we are hesitant and think we aren't really capable of doing it, we can be sure that he will give us what we need to carry it off. Often, the way he does that is by teaming us up with others to do something that individually we wouldn't have managed, but which, together in his strength we can achieve. Maybe you can think back to situations like that you've been in – if so, take encouragement for fresh tasks God might have for you in the future. If not, there is always a first time! Mission is forward looking – God is always looking to doing new things, reaching out to new people, new horizons, innovative methods – albeit with the same good news of Jesus and his love. While our tendency is to hold on to the familiar, to what has been precious to us, what has worked in the past, Jesus is on the move, his Spirit is a spirit of change, development, of planting, growth, new life. Young or old we need to dream dreams, see visions – grasp the realities not just of the challenges that face us but the realities of Jesus' call and equipping, of the new things he has in store and align ourselves with them, ready to participate enthusiastically. So – no ruts please – we're not to get stuck. No excuses either – even though most of us are pretty good at offering them – Jesus knows we're not perfect but he's more than happy to use us anyway – and to equip us for the task in hand. No prima donnas either – we are each to play our part together with others in Jesus' marvelous plan for his kingdom of love, pointing to his glory, not ours. Are we ready? On the move!

May the Lord bless you! Amen.