

Our readings this morning cover three of the fundamentals about the Christian faith. Our reading from Hebrews was all about faith and our gospel reading started by encouraging us not to worry and then telling us to be dressed for action and have our lamps lit as we wait for the returning Christ. Our Christian lives are like a journey where we are encouraged to try to do things well all the way through our lives.

As I considered that journey, the other afternoon I went for a walk: will you now come on that walk with me?

From our house we can be walking round the fields in a couple of minutes. A bit like being on our journey as Christians, there is a beautiful place which is our destination and we want to get there in the best, and ideally quickest, way that we can. We start by going up the road, following the public footpaths sign to Haslingfield - a footpath which is helpfully called the footpath - which particularly in the early summer gets quite overgrown. As we walk down this footpath we certainly feel that we are journeying to somewhere very definite with the closed in sides to that path. There are distractions by the footpath - remember the beginning of our gospel reading? "Do not be afraid little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." I'm not sure this is the flock that Jesus had in mind; I don't think they would make good leaders of the kingdom. Ignoring those distractions we continue on our journey.

We come out of the footpath, go round the corner and we come to the entrance to the fields which we are going to walk around. Before long we come to a junction and we have a choice to make. We can go straight on at that junction into a rather wild and overgrown area or we can walk between two fields - one of these has been harvested; it has done its job for the year, and the other is yet to be harvested. That one is a bit of a mystery. Its growing a crop which some of you might recognise but I haven't got a clue what it is, but that doesn't matter. There is a degree of uncertainty about what we come across on our journey.

Before long we come to one of the main footpaths that we need of follow. It's a wide path. The farmer often keeps it well cut - but only when he has time to do it. It's a path that is usually without many challenges but sometimes it can be difficult. There are times in our lives when we have to veer one way or another; we have to go to slightly off course in order to get to where we want to. You can see where others had to create a new path that we can now follow. You can see why - what is now dried up ground, in the winter is muddy and would be quite a challenge to walk across. But even though we know where we want to go, and we are confident that our footpath will take us there, that footpath has its challenges with cracks appearing on which we could trip, there will be rabbit holes obscured by overgrown grass. We must always be aware of the pitfalls on our journeys.

And then we get to a main path and we look along it and you think what a wonderful nice straight clear path. Unfortunately the nice straight clear path is going in the wrong direction. We need to go the other way where the path is not as easy, but neither is it that difficult. But we know in the corner of the field there is a potential shortcut and there's a footpath down the side of the field. We follow it and then we get to the corner and suddenly we see no footpath ahead. Have we made a mistake on our journey. Is taking the short cut the right thing to do? Can we even go this way? We get to be brave and go a bit closer. There's a possibility. We go into the undergrowth, well that's what it feels like, and we see another path which could take us to where we want to go and then a problem. This picture doesn't really quite show how big a problem it is but those pieces of wood at the bottom of a pretty much dried up ditch are about 6 foot below us and I for one know my limitations, and knowing our limitations is so important. And we know then that our shortcut was not the right thing for us to do. So we retrace our steps back through that slightly overgrown area, up through the side of the field, and then after we

found a safer place to cross that ditch, back down the other side into the field we were aiming for. But then we remember there's a problem with that field. In order to get to where we want to get to there are challenges: in this case it is stinging nettles and we are not, on our walk, prepared for stinging nettles. Shorts and stinging nettles are not a winning combination. But we go on to see whether we can find a way through and we're glad we had the courage to continue because somebody very kindly has cut down all the stinging nettles and taking them away. The way through to my destination is clear – we shouldn't always see obstacles as insurmountable. On our way we have a quick look at the other side of that ditch which we opted against crossing. It looks just as tricky from the other side and in fact looking a little further along which we can now see, we realise why that shortcut, even when at our fittest, was not a great idea!

And then we arrive. That beautiful river is at the far end of that field. It is a river that is often full of hope as you see swans and ducks with their babies; you see it is a river that people have clearly cared for; you see it as a river which is a joy to walk alongside. So we walk along by the river happy that we're at the place where we were aiming to get to.

But then we have to leave that place and looking at our ongoing journey we come across another ditch which looks nothing in this picture but believe you me we can't safely cross it, so again we go up the side of the field. But even then going on that unexpected detour we can look across the fields and see the variety of things that are growing in those fields. There is the natural grass; there are some self-set plants; we can just see the cultivated crops and there are the trees and we see all the amazing things which are part of God's wonderful world, and we thank Him for it.

And then we get back completely on our path; there's another field of that crop whatever it is; there is a field which has been harvested but there is still some tidying up to be done - an incomplete job -we must remember on our journeys not to leave jobs incomplete. We go past what could be the source of refreshment and nourishment later on but not yet as the blackberries are very green berries. Then we are encouraged to find a way marker reassuring us that we are on the right route and showing us which is the path we should take.

Look, some beautiful flowers which really don't look anything in this picture but really are quite amazing. We often will come across the unexpected on our journeys. We carry on up this path, as we get tired it seems to go on and on, but what can we see? Are there buildings? Is that possibly the end of our field journey? Is that a gate to take us out of the fields? Indeed. We have finished our walk around the fields. A quick walk down the road, and then a quick left turn and there's our home sticking out between the trees. Dove cottage is our home, and we arrive ready to be refreshed for another journey.

Thank you for walking with me. From our gospel reading, "But know this: you also must be ready for the son of man is coming at an unexpected hour". When you are on your journeys be careful where you go; make sure you make the right choices; and always be ready to arrive at your destination - there you will be refreshed – whenever that happens.