

One of the joys of Kate having retired from teaching is that we can take holidays in times other than school holidays. Having said that, this is one of the weeks when Facebook appears to be covered with friends posting pictures of where they are this week – and one of my friends has been posting pictures of their, as she calls them, moments of pottering loveliness, in the Lake District. There are pictures of beautiful views of lakes many hundreds of metres below them, and there are pictures of little cairns on mountain tops, and also one or two crosses of differing designs, apparently on hillsides in the middle of nowhere. And they made me wonder who might have put them there, were they a sign of a pilgrimage of some sort, and where were the pilgrims going.

As I'm sure you recognised, we just listened to an extract from the Sound of Music as the mother superior sings to the novice nun Maria who is facing a real challenge in her life as how what she felt was God's call on her life to be a nun was being challenged by a growing love of the father of the wonderful von Trapp children, Captain Von Trapp. A different sort of pilgrimage perhaps

Climb every mountain
Search high and low
Follow every byway
Every path you know

Often walking in the hills, or up mountains even, can simply be a way of relaxing, or getting some exercise, or aiding our mental health even. It can be a familiar route or you may have to work out your route as you go along

But other times it can be necessity to get from A to B to go over a mountain. And that can be hard. There is a reason why the phrase, it feels like we have a real mountain to climb, when people face a significant challenge, is such an appropriate phrase to use.

But however hard it is, unless you are really unlucky with the weather, when you arrive at the top of that mountain you will be blessed with gorgeous views, and a sense of satisfaction that you have arrived. Your pilgrimage may have reached a conclusion.

And the bible makes much use of mountains to get its point across.

Our first reading this morning tells of Moses climbing Mount Sinai at God's instructions to meet him and receive the tablets on which were written the 10 commandments. Surely this must have been a huge challenge for Moses – at a best estimate he was probably about 80 when he went up this mountain, with just his young assistant Joshua by his side. But there were no views from the top for him. The top of the mountain was covered in cloud – but it was no ordinary cloud. It was the glory of the Lord – which was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain visible to those below. And Moses went into that cloud and experienced the glory of the Lord. And the Lord taught him what he had to do next – how to build the ark of the covenant; about daily offerings, about the priesthood, about the sabbath.

Climb every mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream

But then it went wrong. This amazing pilgrimage of Moses to meet with God was let down by the people of God, who got impatient waiting for Moses to return and persuaded Moses' brother Aaron to build them a golden calf which they could worship. And when God sent Moses back to them in a hurry, Moses saw what they had done and threw down the tablets and smashed them – surely destroying his pilgrimage. But then Moses pleaded on behalf of the people, and God forgave them, and Moses

Readings: Exodus 24: 12-end
Matthew 17: 1-9

Climb every mountain

St George's Thriplow
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returned to the mountain top where God wrote on two new tablets, and when he came down his face was shining with the Glory of God. Moses' pilgrimage to find the promised land, his dream, which would take another 40 years, was back on course, and would last the rest of his life – even if he, of course, was not allowed to lead his people into the promised land.

A dream that will need
All the love you can give
Every day of your life
For as long as you live

Our second reading again features a mountain – Jesus led three of the disciples up a high mountain – and he was transfigured before them, he shone like the sun and his clothes became a dazzling white. And they were joined by Moses and Elijah. Again a cloud covered the mountain top and a voice said, This is my Son with whom I am well pleased.

We have here another pilgrimage to meet God – the cloud signifies it is God who is there – and the words that were heard were last heard when Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. Jesus, the Son of God, has been in the presence of his Father, and in the same way that Moses was shining when being in the presence of God, so is Jesus.

As I suggested earlier by that phrase, 'it feels like we have a real mountain to climb', not all the mountains we come across in our lives are physical ones. Sometimes we face difficulties in our lives where we feel helpless to do anything – it may be a sadness for some near to us; it may be a financial issue we cannot see a way out of; it may be health challenge we are facing. Or it may be a combination of different things, and perhaps we just don't know how to even turn to God for help.

So what I want to suggest to you today is that over the next 7 weeks you go on a pilgrimage of your own. That pilgrimage will be a journey through Lent.

Lent starts next Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, and if you are free then I encourage you to come to the service we are holding at St Mary's Fowlmere at 8pm to start your pilgrimage. It is a service of Holy Communion with what we call the Imposition of Ashes. And I will be making that service the beginning of our pilgrimage together, and I will be explaining why we do what we are going to do at that service. So try and make that your pilgrimage start.

Then during Lent we are going to be studying the book of James as our Lent course – Tuesday evening in person in Fowlmere and Wednesday lunchtime on Zoom. And the focus on our study will be discipleship and how we grow that discipleship.

And then during Lent you may want to do something special by yourself to help you remember that that this is Lent – the period where we prepare ourselves for the remembering of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Some people find it helpful to give something up, some people like to do something extra – whatever you choose to do needs to be something significant to you. If you can't think of anything that seems right to you then don't worry about – perhaps just try and join the Lent study.

And then from April 2nd to April 9th it is Holy Week. This will be culmination of our pilgrimage. We are still working out the final details of what will happen that week but try and keep as much time as you can free to join what is going on. This is the most important week of our year. We will remember and study all that happened that week. The triumphal arrival in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday of Jesus – who knows he is coming there to die. We will be recreating a version of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday with our Agape Meal. We will remember his death on Good Friday in several different ways – hopefully to

Day: Sunday next before Lent

Date: 19 February 2023

Readings: Exodus 24: 12-end
Matthew 17: 1-9

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help everyone, of all ages, to remember that day. So watch out for the details of what is happening that week.

And on Easter Day we will be celebrating with Informal Communion at each of our churches, the resurrection. At that stage this particular pilgrimage will be finished. We will have climbed our mountains.

We hope that at the end of our pilgrimages we will all feel that we are filled with the glory of God. We will understand a little bit more about the mountains we have to climb, the streams we have to cross, the rainbows we must follow, so our dreams can be fulfilled.

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Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream