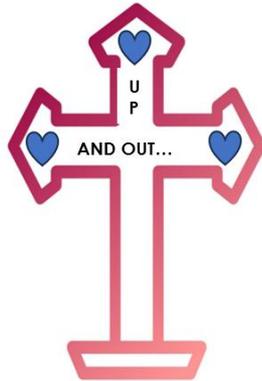


*Look up... and set out! The Journey home.*



So this year we have been embracing a theme of 'Lent as a homecoming' – to who we really are, and are meant to be, and to a closer relationship with God. Returned home to his love, his life, his joy... for ourselves and to share.

We have a sense of homecoming...

..... but to come home, one has to set forth.

Lent is often described as a journey, and for good reason.

It is supposed to take us somewhere .

To help us reflect on where we find ourselves, and on our direction. Often it feels that we don't have time, or perhaps we can become either too content - willing to accept things as they are; or too despairing or cynical – not able to believe that anything can change.

Jesus promises us new beginnings at Easter – he promises us an arrival. But how willing are we to set out? How willing are we to lay the old down, and journey on anew into the unknown? How able are we to accept there could be something to find?

The Lord said to Abram.... Go from your country, from your family, from generations of history and tradition and culture – to an un-named land that you must ... trust ... that I will bring you to. Leave behind your security, your familiarity... and set out.

And our scripture merely says 'so Abram went'. A simple three words for what must have been a *huge* decision. An act of trust.

On the way, Abram would travel through times of laying down, of waiting, of doubting, of thinking. But he would also discover new joy, a new name, new life, and new and deep trust. And... that God keeps his promises, and did indeed bring him home.

Nicodemus, in our gospel reading today, is also on a journey of homecoming. He sets out at night – as we often do –feeling in the dark, not able to see the path ahead.

Nicodemus' story, as the gospel unfolds, takes him from this initial secret night journey, to being one of those who care for Jesus' body after crucifixion. It takes him from being someone afraid, unsure of his identity ... to someone who has come home to love. Bold in who he is, and what he is doing.

But now, he is merely setting out – coming to Jesus seeking hope, healing, and guidance.

He says to Jesus- look I can see what you're doing – I can see the love and the healing and the wisdom and goodness that comes from you. And by that fruit I know you've come from God. So following you will lead me home to God. But ... I know that to follow you will mean I have to be prepared to grow, to seek new things, to lay things down. And I am worried, I am too old, I am too secure... and I'm not sure I dare.

Did you hear those repeated questions? "But....teacher.... How can... how can....?"

Jesus says, trust me... through water, through the Spirit, you can become new, find again who you were born to be.

I feel for Nicodemus. Sometimes it is hard to get perspective, isn't it. Hard to know what to hold to, and which way to turn. And even if we recognise as love reaching to us, we find ourselves saying ... "but, Lord... how can? How can?...."

But I also have serious respect for him – how brave he is to ask the questions, and to seek the answers – to look out and beyond his own knowledge, ready and prepared to be challenged, and surprised by something new.

Through water and the Spirit – through the grace of God claiming us, washing us newly, and the Spirit guiding us home. We can always begin again. Always begin anew.

There's a strange story in the Hebrew Scriptures about a disease outbreak in the desert, amongst the people of Israel, whilst they were on their long journey to the promised land. They become hungry, thirsty, and afraid.

Their community fractures and turns inward on itself. The storyteller imagines the infection as a plague of serpents that bite everyone, so everyone gets unwell. Serpents have always been the imagery of brokenness and temptation.

We all have a snake that whispers in our hearts. We are all broken, in different ways. We all need a journey home.

It might be one of stirring us from our complacency, calling us to take risks, to set out on adventures, to find a fuller life, to grow into ourselves and believe in possibility.

It might be one of calling us back from destructive habits where we limit ourselves, or have got lost in habits that lead us away from love and life

In the story, God tells Moses to make a bronze snake, put it on a pole, and lift it high in the air. Moses does, and everyone who looks on this snake, is healed.

That snake becomes for the people a sign of the way home.

*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, says Jesus, so must the Son of Man be lifted up .... as the snake is lifted up and the people are all look at it for healing, so Jesus is lifted up on the Cross, and we too must look to him. Look up, and set out.*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should have eternal life.*

How do we know the way home? *I am the way, says Jesus, believe in the Father and believe in me.*

Keep looking at me.

Every week in the Eucharist the priest raises the chalice high and says 'behold' - calls us all to gaze as Jesus is lifted high amongst us, like that snake on the pole. Like he was on the cross. Lifting up our human

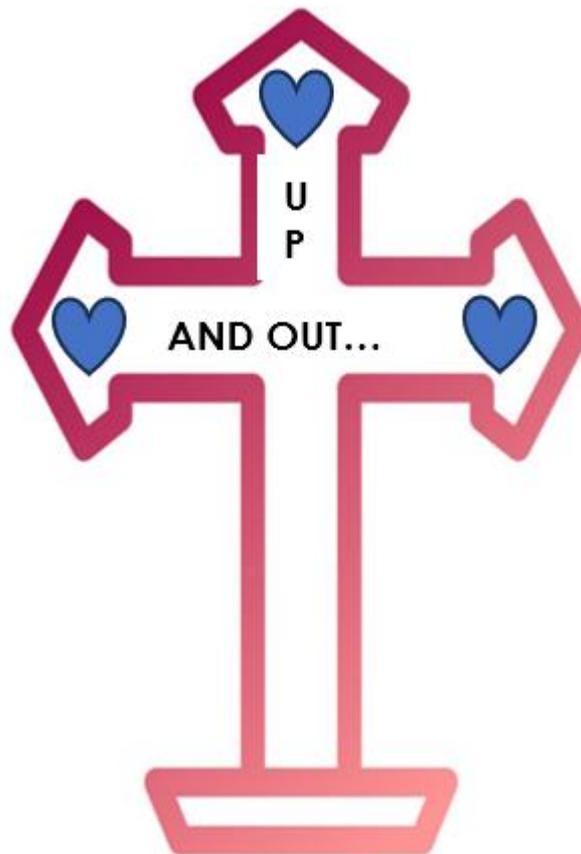
brokenness and fear, and meeting it with forgiveness, love and new beginnings. Calling us home.

Sisters and brothers, in our journey this Lent...

Let us look up...

and set out.

*Just like this:*



Jesus calls to us, .... trust me, I will bring you home.

..... but remember, to come home, one has to set forth.

If today were not a Sunday we would be celebrating *Davey-bach* – S. David, great saint of the early British church. I am sure many of you will be familiar with his dying words...

*byddwch lawen. Cadwch eich ffydd a'ch cred, a gwnewch y pethau bychain a glywsoch ac a welsoch gennyf –*

*'be joyful. Keep the faith. Do the little things that you have heard and seen in me'*

It doesn't have to be dramatic, just setting out, doing the little things, looking to the Lord to see where he will lead us...

I leave you with the words of Frodo Baggins, setting out on a journey of discovery, to play his little part in the salvation of the world, leaving behind the familiar, the cosy, and growing in wisdom on the journey... a journey where the destination and the purpose are really unknown to him, but he goes for love, and in trust...

The Road goes ever on and on  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.

Lent is a journey... it's supposed to take us somewhere.

Keep looking to Christ, look up and set out. Do the little things each day... ... we might not know the way ahead, but we do know it leads us home.