

Hello everyone.

Peter asks Jesus in John's gospel. Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow later.

Maybe that echoes with us as we start to plan for the future?

Yes, Jesus is correct Peter and his disciples can't follow his way yet, but they can plan and follow his commandment in their hearts, by looking at how he lives and embraces everyone and trying to be like him.

It's the basis of our faith, we don't follow strict rules when we gather in our buildings and in our communities to follow Jesus. We gather knowing that entering into the gospel, the good news of Jesus is like walking into a large cave with nooks and crannies to explore, each of which tells us something of Jesus and each of us will look round that cave in a different order won't we, but together we are all living the good news. There is no one right way when it comes to church, is

there? And that has always been the strength of the church of Scotland. That is why I am part of it and not any other denomination.

And that tradition can be traced right back to the bible. We have four versions of Jesus story in our new testament. Four stories about one man and each of them shows Jesus from a different angle, but what you can't do is superimpose the pictures on top of each other to get one story. It doesn't work. Back in the day when I first was involved in church, the most impressive way of presenting we had was the over head projector. You drew or printed pictures on to acetate sheets and then when a light was shone through it, the picture was displayed on a screen. You could overlay acetate sheets to build up a picture or a graph or whatever. However if you put too much information on a sheet all you got was a strange confusing blur.

And that's what happens if you try to put all four accounts of Jesus life together in one picture-you

get a blur. You lose the marvellous openness of interpretation that makes the gospels so special. How do we know because the history of the church has had to deal with just that issue in its past. In some ways its what made the church pause in the great councils of early centuries and write the creeds. Not to constrain us in our thinking but to broaden us into discovering the places where different stories touched as they helped us see how to handle different interpretations more subtly than picking and choosing.

The four gospels together tell the start of the story of how a rag bag of group of followers of a Jewish prophet became our Christian church of today.

Peter asks Jesus Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered you can't follow me yet, but the disciples can and did follow the way Jesus left them that was to know he was with them even when they couldn't see him and that Jesus accompanied them in all they did as they lived

showing respect and help to those they met. Sometimes they got it right and at other times in church history we got it terribly wrong.

But how does that help us today? Well instead of a poem this week, I've chosen two pictures. A picture of a young child walking through God's creation holding tight to the hand of an adult. Is that a summary of how the disciples saw God and Jesus? Does it ring any bells with you at this present time when we are starting to prepare to leave lockdown? We plan with Jesus. Our church will not be open again it seems for some time, But Jesus walks with us through the world. Take sometime today to put your hand up and feel him with you.

I've been so grateful during lockdown for all who came and tidied and cleared the church garden in front of the manse. What a marvellous job has been done. Not just the garden, but the hedge in front of the church too. The path to the manse gate by the church has been repaired too and

looks so smart. One person said to me that with its stripes, the path reminded them of the social distancing marks outside shops. And I suppose it does. That got me thinking. Just six months ago that phrase would not have meant anything.

Someone might have called it a zebra crossing, but never a set of social distancing marks for shopping. But it's an idea that I really like. Thank you to the gardeners. You have not just created a practical path, but a sculpture that will remind us for ever of the time we were locked down and had to stand in socially distanced queues to buy a pint of milk and a loaf of bread.

So, this week take time to think how you view the various stories of Jesus as we move on our journey striding over the stripes holding the hand of Jesus and trying to fit the various difficult and reassuring bits of the gospels together as we construct the East church of the future as one in continuity with all that has gone before.

Enjoy reflecting on the church and its future this week.

Peace be with you

Amen.