

Hello everyone

What if this road that has held no surprises these many years,

Decided not to go home after all.

That's how our poem this morning starts.

What if life decided to do the unexpected it's asking us to contemplate.

We sometimes find that difficult don't we?

It can be scary.

We live in a world where information is simple to get.

The computer and Alexa are always there to help out

Whether we want to know the time, the weather forecast or the birthday of our favourite musician.

No spoilers is a very modern phrase we are familiar with

But actually, it describes a very old thought. We like that comfortable feel for life don't we

The planned approach.

But what happens when we acknowledge that our lives are rich in possibilities.

Maybe sometimes it's exciting to go the long way round with all its twists and turns.

What if it could go left or right with no more ado, our poem asks

What if it chose to lay itself down in a new way

Around a blind corner, across hills you must climb without knowing what's on the other side.

How would we feel?

How would we cope?

Do we want to know the end of the story or where a road will go?

The poet asks us today?

Well do we?

When it comes to the church and its future

We know what God has told us

That he will always be with us and to follow Jesus because he will show us how it all works.

But which way the road goes when it comes to spreading the good news maybe that sometimes isn't so clear.

But it's always been like that .

Luke writes his account of the spread of the early church in the acts of the apostles. They know the end of the story.

They are charged by Jesus to spread the good news from Jerusalem out through Samaria to the ends of the earth. We who come after those first followers of Jesus are charged with the same story. The same ending.

But spreading the good news turns out for the early church to be not so straightforward.

Luke does put it all into a neat linear story, but there are hints throughout that it wasn't as straightforward as it seems.

You will receive the holy spirit Jesus says then I want you to be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And the first seven chapters of the second book Luke writes, the focus is on Jerusalem. The disciples pool their resources at the start, live communally, meeting in houses and in the temple. The church leaders preach, perform miracles and are persecuted to some extent by the Jerusalem authorities.

That persecution comes to a head when a young Greek speaking Jew called Stephen provokes the crowds and the authorities when his preaching seems to undermine the law of Moses and even attack the temple system. As a consequence, he is stoned and killed.

The followers apart from the Apostles then find themselves surprisingly having to leave Jerusalem. They are scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.. They travelled around preaching the word.

The next few chapters describe the spread of Christianity through Samaria, an Ethiopian is converted by Philip. Has a conversion experience on the road to who becomes Paul. We read of the activities of Peter, the conversion of Cornelius and his household and the acceptance of gentiles by the church back in Jerusalem. Then Peter seems to disappear from the account Luke has given to us and Paul and his colleagues take centre stage. Luke writes about their adventures around various cities. Yet next week when we look at Paul's letters, a slightly different slant on what happens emerges.

As with the gospels pictures of the life of Jesus, the new testament writers offer us a series of pictures of how the early church spread outward from Jerusalem.

The road the church takes seems to turn left or right with no more ado than a kite tails as our poet puts it.

Peter, John, Philip, Paul and the disciples roll out the new shape of the church as they move ever closer to the ends of the earth.

But it isn't a neat unfurling, there are twists and turns everywhere.

And maybe we w ask well nothing has really changed since those early days of the church. We too have continually to adapt and cross hills we must climb without knowing what's on the other side.

What if the road the church that has held no surprises these many year, decided not to go home after all.

Well actually we as the church should remember that while we do know the end of the story, the route or road the church has been going has always held surprises. There's nothing new today.

All that's new is the same as it has always been. That we faithfully and boldly preach the message of Jesus,

son of God, using a variety of methods. We've become quite used even to that new idea during the last few months as worship and meetings have moved online. Who would have thought that would happen even at the start of 2020.

Now as we look to the future of the church, we do with a future rich with possibilities, but secure in the knowledge of God promised presence in all that we do.

Peace be with you

Amen