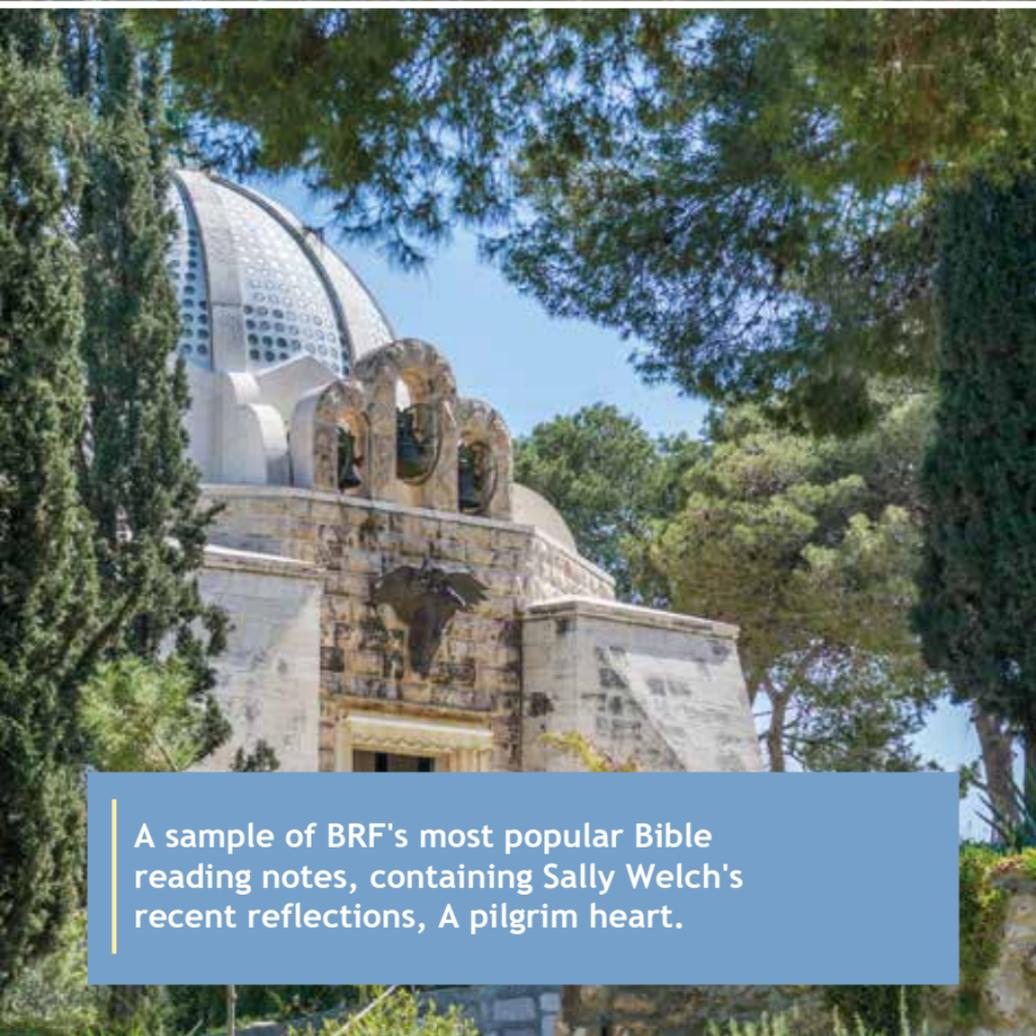


MAY-AUGUST 2020



# New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



A sample of BRF's most popular Bible reading notes, containing Sally Welch's recent reflections, A pilgrim heart.

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## A pilgrim heart

As part of my work, I lecture and lead workshops on pilgrimage. I cover all aspects of pilgrimage spirituality – its history, its practice and its place in the life of the church today. Often I begin by showing a picture of me on pilgrimage, which I describe as ‘me at my best’ – being most fully the person God has called me to be. But this concept has its problems, because I cannot spend all my time making pilgrimages – I have a church, a family, a home, friends and neighbours, commitments and obligations. After much prayer and reflection, I realised that I needed to take the most significant aspects of pilgrimage, its effects and its blessings, and incorporate them into my everyday life. Instead of simply referring to life as a journey, I would endeavour to practise those skills that served me well on pilgrimage and use them as best I could in my home surroundings.

One of the gifts of pilgrimage is that it offers the time and the space to reflect, to recharge and to resource ourselves with the wisdom that the road can offer. The following notes are some of the fruit of my times of reflection. I hope they illustrate some of the insights offered by the practice of pilgrimage and show how they can be used to deepen our relationship with God, with our fellow human beings and with ourselves, whether or not we are physically journeying.

For clarity, I use the term pilgrimage to mean a ‘spiritual journey to a sacred place’. It can refer to a journey by foot of many days or weeks, or a short walk of a few hours. Journeys using less physical means, such as by car or coach, can have a similar impact, but my personal experience – and these reflections – is drawn from the spirituality of the walked path.

*Who would true valour see,  
Let him come hither;  
One here will constant be,  
Come wind, come weather.  
There's no discouragement  
Shall make him once relent  
His first avowed intent  
To be a pilgrim.*

(John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 1684)

## Deciding to go

Then [Pharaoh] said, ‘Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!’ The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, ‘We shall all be dead.’ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading-bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders.

So begins one of the founding events of the Jewish faith – the escape of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the promised land. And what a hasty, hurried event it was! The evening had been spent making what preparations they could for departure, gathering up clothes and possessions into easily portable bundles, making sure small children and animals would be kept safe, saying farewell to familiar surroundings. Then the hours of anxious waiting before the final command initiating that great rush to join the streams of people leaving the land of captivity and heading towards the unknown.

Most pilgrimages do not begin like this. Although I have met pilgrims who were impelled by intense feeling or the powerful impulse of an event to set off with only the most basic of preparations, the majority of pilgrimages are the product of months of planning, training and saving. The project of making a pilgrimage often springs from a small seed of an idea – watching a programme on television, meeting someone who has done a similar journey or reading an inspirational book. Or a pilgrimage can have been a long-term ambition, the pilgrim waiting patiently for the right time and situation before finally committing themselves to the journey.

Similarly with our faith journey – we may be impelled to seek God through a crisis or we may spend much time in debating and pondering on the nature of the unknown. Others may have experienced faith-based living all their lives. All these journeys have their own integrity – all that matters is that we decide to set out.

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*Lord, hold me by the hand as I step out along your way.*

SALLY WELCH

## Leaving

‘Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you’... Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.’

Jacob has been sent by his father Isaac to visit the home of his maternal grandfather in order to marry. In the night he dreamt of that famous ladder reaching up to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, and he heard God’s wonderful promise, ‘I am with you.’ Now he makes a covenant with God, promising commitment and obedience in return for the gift of God’s presence. Such a gift will mean that his journey can be made in confidence, secure in the knowledge that he does not journey alone.

It is a risky business, setting off on a journey, whether the journey is that of deepening our faith, entering into a new relationship or beginning a trek of many days. We may quite rightly be apprehensive about the future, for who knows what will happen to us along the way? What terrors might we meet? What accidents might befall us? But there will be joys as well – times of delight and happiness, when our steps are light and the path is filled with wonder.

If we allow him, God will make Jacob’s covenant with each one of us, extending his loving protection over us wherever we go, until he leads us safely home once more. Then we can explore in safety, free to wander along unfamiliar tracks and pathways, sheltered as we are by God’s loving hand over us.

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*‘And you will have confidence, because there is hope;  
you will be protected and take your rest in safety’ (Job 11:18).*

SALLY WELCH

## How to sing a new song?

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples.

As I have got older, I have become more fond of routine, particularly at the beginning of the day. I like to get up at the same time, whether I am working or on holiday; I like the same food for breakfast and I like to read the newspaper in peace. Going on pilgrimage changes all this – I must get up at a time to suit either my accommodation or my fellow pilgrims; I must eat whatever is provided by the hostel or whatever I can find along the route; I have very little time to read the paper. For the first few days of any pilgrimage, therefore, I feel scratchy and uncomfortable, taken from the familiar framework of my day. Gradually, however, new rhythms emerge that are based around other set features – lacing my boots, filling up my water bottle, pausing to breathe deeply before setting foot outside the door. In time these become such familiar friends that on my return I struggle to adapt to my domestic routine.

Changes to our patterns of life are sometimes welcome – a new arrival into the family, perhaps, or a successful operation bringing relief from pain. Other changes can bring discomfort or suffering – a house or job move, an absence, even a death. We might struggle to adapt, finding it hard to locate God within the new circumstances in which we find ourselves. We might discover that our usual ways of meeting God are inadequate and unsatisfying, experiencing a sense of loss and alienation.

During these times we can find comfort in remembering what God has done for us in the past and how faithfully he has kept his promises to us. Confident of his presence, we can look for ways of singing new songs that will fill us with hope for the journey ahead.

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*Lord God, you have guarded and guided me in the past;  
help me to step forward confidently into the future.*

SALLY WELCH

## Travelling light

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, ‘Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic.’

Packing for a pilgrimage is a highly skilled activity. On the one hand, it is important to carry all that is necessary to journey successfully and safely – appropriate clothing, food and water, a first aid kit, a phone charger, maps. On the other hand, the heavier the pack, the greater the chances of disaster – tired walkers fall more easily, make navigational mistakes, misjudge dangers. Getting the balance right is vitally important.

In our daily lives, we tread the same tightrope. If we lack the basic necessities, our lives become narrowed, perhaps even shortened. If, however, we surround ourselves with material possessions, we are in danger of being submerged by them, as we turn into guardians of our goods rather than inhabitants of a wider universe. When Jesus sent out his disciples to preach, heal and teach, he sent them with nothing apart from their faith in God to provide them with all they needed. Travelling light, they could move swiftly; carrying no supplies, they were forced to rely on the goodness of others, bringing the gift of charity to the places they visited; without the security of belongings, they found security in God and within themselves, as they saw the wonders that their faith produced: ‘On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done’ (Luke 9:10).

As we continue our journey through life, let us pledge to hold lightly to the things we own – enjoying them but not burdened by them, happy to share them with others and always willing to leave them behind if it becomes necessary to do so.

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*How might you travel more lightly? What things can you do without or would benefit others more than they do you? How can you share the blessings that you have received with those who have less?*

SALLY WELCH

## Waiting for the right time

A scribe then approached and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' Another of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'

My husband is a great journey planner. He loves maps and guidebooks, and at the first indication that I am thinking of making a pilgrimage he will bury his head in the appropriate literature and scour the internet for the best advice on routes and accommodation. In this he is a real blessing, as I have little skill and no interest in this sort of thing. However, very often the journeys we plan will come to nothing – work commitments, the needs of our family and the very effort of planning and carrying out a pilgrimage all conspire to encourage us to do nothing, letting the maps gather dust on the table in the study while we get on with other tasks.

The harshness of Jesus' response to that perfectly sensible request to bury one's father is, I think, based in our natural apathy when it comes to actually getting on and doing what we said we would do. Commentaries have stated that burying one's father does not mean actually attending the funeral of a deceased relative, but instead waiting for the commitment to a family to end in the form of a death that has not yet happened. Jesus tells the scribe that 'now' is a good time – in fact the only time – giving him a sense of urgency about his task and encouraging him to make sure his priorities are the right ones. Sometimes we cannot begin new projects until other commitments have been honoured; at other times these are simply excuses we hide behind in order to avoid stepping out on a new and potentially risky venture.

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*Lord God, you know the purpose you have for my life.  
Help me to discern that purpose and to work towards it.*

SALLY WELCH

## ‘You shall also love the stranger’\*

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him... When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’

One of the gifts of pilgrimage is discovering new travelling companions. A group of strangers who gather to make a pilgrimage together is like a whole stocking full of Christmas gifts – some quirky and funny; some practical and useful; each one chosen with care. The fun of examining each knobbly package, unwrapping it and discovering the contents is paralleled in the surprises that lie hidden in the characters and conversations of those we walk beside.

I have met leaders of industry, poets, priests and waiters on my journeys and have discovered things I never would have expected, both from them and in my response to their experiences. Often I have been shamed by my initial expectations, as an apparently tedious companion has in turn had me both laughing and crying with their anecdotes, reminding me that outward appearances can be deceptive. Just as the hearts of the disciples were ‘burning’ within them as they spoke to Jesus, so I have learnt great truths from those who have shared the route with me.

Wherever we are, whatever our journeys, there are opportunities for new travelling companions – those we meet in church, at social events, even on hospital visits can become part of our journey experience, offering a rich seam of learning if we are willing to hear their tales and seek the truth that lies within them.

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*Lord, help me to travel with ‘opened eyes’*

SALLY WELCH

\* DEUTERONOMY 10:19

## Journey companions – meeting with strangers

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, ‘My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on – since you have come to your servant.’

This story has been made famous by Rublev’s icon of the event. The icon is also said to represent the Trinity, as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit gather round the Communion table, making the shape of a chalice as they do so.

The generosity of Abraham to his guests is rewarded by their prophecy of a child to Sarah, his long-barren wife. It serves as a reminder of the unexpected gifts that strangers seeking hospitality might bring with them – not miracle babies, perhaps, but the opportunity to reach out in love to others, sharing what we have in honour of a God who shared his life and death with us.

We too, in turn, might be in need of hospitality from strangers, and then the art of receiving gracefully and gratefully that which we are offered, accepting gifts as blessings and using them in the best way we can, will become in itself a form of praise to the God who created all things and made us stewards of his bountiful provision.

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*If you are able, find an illustration of Rublev’s beautiful icon painted in 1410 in Russia – either as a postcard or on the internet. Spend some time simply looking at it, exploring its depths and allowing its message to become part of you: ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.’*

SALLY WELCH

## Travelling with ourselves

But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die.' Then the Lord said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'

After all that Jonah has been through, he still hasn't quite 'got it'! Furious that the people of Nineveh have listened to his message and repented, thus saving themselves from God's wrath, Jonah spent the previous day sulking under a bush, which has now withered. God, in his infinite tenderness, arranged this lesson to show just how much he cares for his people and how great is his rejoicing when they turn once more towards him. A valuable lesson has been taught, using the natural world as an example – not the first time this has happened and certainly not the last.

The moment we engage with the natural landscape, we see signs of God's care for his creation – in the detail of plants and flowers, the infinite variety of weather conditions, the vast expanse of skies and seas. As we journey, we too become captivated by our surroundings and see our own place within them – and thus God's great love for each one of us.

Many great journeys are undertaken in order to seek healing or understanding or simply to escape – not always successfully. One of the most important lessons we are taught by the road is that wherever we journey we take ourselves with us; our first priority should be to forgive and love ourselves, seeing ourselves as God sees us. It is only then that we will be able to reach out to others and show by our words and actions that they too are infinitely precious to God.

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*'Come to him, a living stone... chosen and precious in God's sight'*  
(1 Peter 2:4).

SALLY WELCH

## Obstacles on the journey

**They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse their king and their gods. They will turn their faces upwards, or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.**

Walking a long way for one day is achievable for almost anyone with a basic level of fitness. Although the final few miles can be tough going, there is usually enough adrenaline in the system to help us through to the end. To get up the following day, stiff and aching, with sore feet and a great weariness, and set off once more can take real courage, as well as a significant amount of effort.

Many people consistently overestimate their level of fitness when planning a long pilgrimage – they do not train hard enough before they set off or they aim to walk an impossibly large number of miles each day. Too often I have seen optimistic walkers striding out at a rapid pace, only to encounter them by the roadside, nursing blisters, tendonitis or similar afflictions. They then have to decide whether to continue on, hoping that their feet and muscles will recover if they adopt a gentler pace, or to stop for a while or altogether.

Unless we are miraculously fortunate, each one of us will encounter physical difficulties to a greater or lesser extent in our lives. Sometimes these are mild or brief enough that they can be weathered fairly easily; at other times their effect is life-altering. The temptation then is to look around for something or someone to blame, to resent the restrictions imposed upon us by our illness and even to take out our anger at our lot on those who share our lives. The struggle and the challenge will be not to ‘see only distress and darkness’ but to focus on the light – the small signs of improvement; the things we are able still to do; the ways in which we can still positively affect our neighbours and our surroundings.

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*Lord God, help me to light a candle, not curse the darkness.*

SALLY WELCH

## Finding out the way

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

This is the original pilgrim's psalm for me – short enough to remember, long enough to provide a rhythm to accompany my footsteps. I also use it plentifully when I am standing at the crossroads in the middle of the countryside, staring desperately at a map, trying to decide where to go! To be honest, it is not a lot of help when I am navigating, but it does remind me of the goodness of a God who not only accompanies each one of us on our life's journey, but ensures that our direction and our destination is the right one for us. Wherever we are led by life's events or wherever our own wilful souls may take us, we will find the necessary support and help when we need it.

At the end of a recent discussion held in my church on faith and doubt in the modern world, the speaker reminded us that not only does God meet us on the right path, but he meets us on the wrong path too and gently, lovingly, guides us to our destination. We probably should not start from where we do at times, but God's ways will lead us home.

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*God of my pilgrimage, help me to be aware of your guiding presence; give me courage as I journey through dark valleys and let me experience the restoration of your peace. May I follow your path and walk in your ways this day and forever.*

SALLY WELCH

## Resting

**Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.**

As a parish priest and as a mother and grandmother, there are never enough hours in the day. However early I wake and however continuously I move from task to task, barely pausing for breath, I still cannot get to the end of my to-do list. As soon as one item is checked off, another four are added to the bottom, ensuring that the satisfaction of ticking everything off will never be experienced.

In the early days of my ministry, I did not allow myself to stop and soon learnt the lesson that non-stop working is good for neither vicar nor church community. Now I take seriously the blessing that God gives to our times of rest, following the example that he himself set. No matter how we treat the seven days – literally or metaphorically – the element of rest is an integral part of the process of creation.

So too for us – whether on a physical or a spiritual journey, we must make sure that we give ourselves time to pause and reflect. We can look back on where we have travelled from and set our sight line once more on our destination. We can allow the creative Spirit to fill our souls, stepping aside from the treadmill of busyness to imagine, to dream, to wish, to replenish our vision. Then we will be able to tread the path once more with renewed vigour, approaching our tasks with rested hearts and minds: ‘For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength’ (Isaiah 30:15)

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*When did you last take a proper time of rest and reflection? When did you last allow yourself space to dream? Is now a good time? If not, when?*

SALLY WELCH

## Unexpected delights

**'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!'**

Last September I led the children in the Sunday Club on their annual pilgrimage. We focused on experiencing God's creation through our five senses, pausing at various points on the way to see, touch, taste, smell and listen. We ate the plump, juicy blackberries that hung in clumps in the hedgerows lining our path. We listened to the noise of the wind in the leaves of the trees and stared out across the hills, trying to spot the towers of the different churches in the area.

We made slow progress, because using our senses takes time. We made slow progress, because I had given each child a small box and invited them to fill it with as many different objects as they could. The whole party engaged in this activity, offering tiny feathers, acorns, different seed heads or brightly coloured stones to whichever child was nearest, encouraging each to look carefully where they walked, anxious to collect every treasure. We made slow progress, because the event was so precious that we wanted it to last as long as it could, savouring every sun-filled moment, conscious that winter was on the horizon and the bright days might not continue.

The gifts offered to us in our daily journeys are often unexpected and may go unnoticed as we pass by with our eyes on the next task, the next goal. Let us delight in small moments of joy, celebrate gestures of love and friendship, and rejoice in the evidence of God's love, which surrounds us all.

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*'This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it'*  
(Psalm 118:24).

SALLY WELCH

## The right path

‘But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.’

Route-finding on a pilgrimage is often hugely challenging. Signposts can be missed, paths too overgrown to spot, maps misread. Realising that you have been following the wrong route is depressing – so much energy wasted! But we must retrace our steps so that we can reach our destination, otherwise we will simply stray further afield. It is difficult to do, but vital.

These must have been the thoughts of that heedless young man in Jesus’ parable, who had earlier set off so merrily, careless of the feelings of the ones he had left behind. How his mind must have lingered on the comforts of his home as his feet hurried towards that place of solace and ease. He could not be sure of his welcome, so ungrateful had he been, but his resolve to accept his punishment and begin afresh was strong enough to overcome all anxiety and fear. What joy he must have felt when he saw his father and realised that all was forgiven and he was truly home.

As we make our life’s journey, we will inevitably wander from the path that leads us home. Fearful of the consequences, we might hesitate to turn again to the right road, afraid that we will no longer be welcome. But our Father, who loves us, forgives us all and will come running to meet us, arms outstretched in his joy at our return.

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*Lord, lead me in right paths to the true destination.*

SALLY WELCH

## Pilgrim hearts

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’

On reaching a pilgrimage destination, particularly one where the journey has cost a lot of effort and time, the first impulse naturally is to give thanks for the safe arrival. Photographs of grinning pilgrims appear on hundreds of different social media sites and internet searches – weary, scruffy walkers, whose grins reflect the elation of a journey’s end.

One of my most poignant mementos of a pilgrimage, however, is a picture of the whole family standing in a cathedral square looking forlorn and sad. We had been so pleased to arrive, and awestruck by the magnificent building that was our destination, but then came the realisation that the adventure was over. No more picnics by riversides or walking through fields and forests. No more sleeping in new places or meeting new people – simply the journey home to the routine of everyday.

Cultivating a pilgrim heart is a precious skill. We must learn to treat every day as an adventure, wherever we find ourselves. We must seek to make friends of strangers and learn new things about familiar companions. We must look with new eyes at well-known landscapes, meeting God in the glories of his creation which surround us. We must journey on, in faith and hope, along the path of righteousness, with Christ as our journey companion and our guide. And always we must hold in our hearts our destination.

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*‘Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life”’ (John 6:68).*

SALLY WELCH



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