



Greenwich 2018 Reunion Sermon at St Alfege's given by Revd. Chris Moody on Sat. 9th June 2018



I know that 'sailing' is really the metaphor I should be using for people with your experience, but I'm going to start with 'walking' instead.

Gill, my wife, and I like to go on long walks on my day off, and usually these are along the river or canals in London, because we don't like to make long journeys by train or car first. That's how we first came across Greenhithe and saw the memorial to HMS Worcester on the shoreline and Ingress Abbey, which used to provide the shore facilities, now the centre of a large residential development. You would not have guesses unless you looked carefully, how different it all would have looked 20 or 30 years ago. It was only because we were walking that we picked up the clues and realized what a rich history or ordinary human experience lay in a place whose past had been flattened and, as it were, ironed out, by the present.

Walking is a way into understanding a whole attitude to life which is very difficult to understand, let alone practice, if you are caught up in the frenetic activity of the present, usually to do with business and



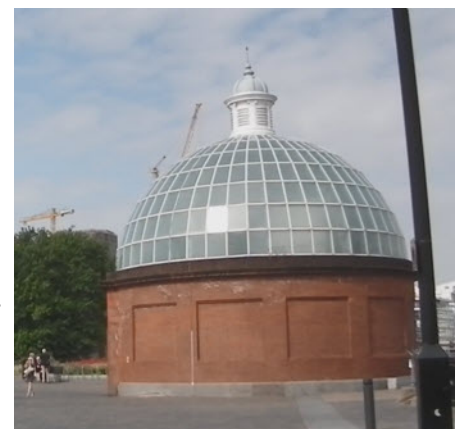
our professional lives, but it can be to do with family as well, even our hobbies. A leisurely, reflective, rhythmic way of life which brings our present, our past and our dreams for the future together, so that we realize the depth and richness of our lives, each of them particular and precious, each of us a vessel which contains a unique cargo of memories and experiences, but at the same time a very small and transitory moment in the long stream of human experience through time.

Sometimes, if we're walking in a place I have known all my life, I think of myself criss-crossing my own path as I was at the age of 5, or 15, or even 30, where I was in my life at that point and

where I am now, what I did not know then, and what I still do not know now, and I feel a renewed sympathy and compassion for myself and those who surrounded me at those different junctures.

Actually, when I think of walking in this way- rhythmic, attentive, reflective- I realize that it is in fact a form of praying. Jesus exhorts us to 'watch and pray' and 'keep awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour', and that is in fact what I am doing on these long meandering walks, with some idea of where I want to get to, but alive to the changes, coincidences and diversions that occur along the way.

Our walks quite often begin with a walk through Greenwich Foot Tunnel to Canary Wharf which, as you know, is the second centre of London's financial district and is constantly changing. It is hard to imagine that only a few decades ago this was the



East India Docks, closed to the outside world unless you happened to be a docker, stevedore, merchant seaman or lorry driver. Just a few cranes, bollards, or permanently docked tug, remind you- if you have the eyes and the imagination- that this was once the case. Because there is always so much building going on, you are always reading company slogans and mission statements. Recently we came across one which was so arrogant and insensitive that it took our breath away. It was for a firm of project managers and interior consultants and it read 'Excuse us whilst..'(I was impressed by the grammar) 'Excuse us whilst we remove yesterday and make way for tomorrow'. What an arrogant statement!

And is it in fact what any of us really want- to erase the past, in order to establish the future? It isn't necessary. In fact, it's dangerous. What we really want is to take our past into our future with us.

The slogan seemed particularly insensitive in a place which had had such a crucial part to play in the nation's past, its mercantile history and the blitz, the millions of human lives caught up in this history. So, I believe that walking and remembering, as well as being a form of praying, is also a form of resistance, of active engagement in resisting the forces and pressures which hollow out and flatten human life and experience.

Which brings me back to your association and its importance to you, and not only to you, but those who come after you and the society around you for whom, now, merchant shipping and the merchant navy is an untold story, whereas before you might well have had somebody in your own family engaged in it. Our service began with a passage that reminds us that we must 'live up our eyes to the heavens'- or, in the words of a prayer, keep our eyes open to the heaven that lies around those who walk by faith as well as by sight- the wonder of existence and our own small part in it. The second reading, the story of Jesus and the storm on the lake, reminds us that we are all frail vessels, tossed about in the turbulence and shocks of life; that our best companions and dearest friends are usually those who have shared most deeply in the same experiences; and that Jesus, the Christ, is the Way, the Truth and the Life, always – as it were- slumbering deep within us, whose life is always there to be awakened again and again, to calm us in times of trouble and to say to us 'Peace, keep walking (or keep sailing) with me, now and always'. Amen

