

## Bennochy church 28th May 2017

There had been plans since before the Second World War for a motorway network in the United Kingdom. Lord Montagu formed a company to build a 'motorway like road' from London to Birmingham in 1923; however it was a further 26 years before the Special Roads Act, 1949 was passed, which allowed for the construction of roads limited to specific vehicle classifications, and the 1950s when the country's first motorways were given the government go-ahead.

The first section of motorway was the Preston Bypass in Lancashire, which opened in 1958 (now part of the M6 motorway). The M1 was Britain's first full-length motorway and opened in 1959. The early M1 had no speed limits, no central reservation or crash barriers, and no lighting.

We all know, that once you are on the Motorway network, you cannot get off, other than at designated exits. This can involve a large detour, if you miss your desired junction! You also know you are on a motorway, because of the big blue signs and the very expensive service stations. I cannot imagine driving, say, to London, prior to the motorways being built and having to go through every town and village.

Acts 16 is part of what is known as Paul's 2nd Missionary journey. In this, he travels across the Roman empire, without the luxury of a motorway network. The closest he had, were the straight Roman roads and the highway of the seas. He began

this journey in Antioch, now southern Turkey, near Syria, and he travelled though Asia Minor to Troas, an ancient Greek city situated on the Aegean Sea, near the northern tip of Turkey's western coast. A distance of approximately 700 miles, as the crow flies. But remember, Paul did not travel in a straight line. I asked Google maps, because you can, how long this would take to walk. The answer, 239 hours, nonstop, about 10 weeks. Our description of the journeys in Acts, tend to condense everything down, and makes it out to be easier than it actually was. This was no stroll in the park. This was 27 continuous marathons, and that was only part of the journey.

God does not seem to have made his mind up! Our intrepid travellers, go up many dead ends and blind alleyways, before they eventually arrive at Troas. Another way of looking at this journey, and remember we are not told any of the details, that there were unrecorded barriers, that forced them in a new direction. That part of the story, is left to our imaginations to fill in the gaps. But looking back, our author Luke, sees the hand of God, leading Paul and his companions ultimately to Troas. Troas is a significant place. Not because they hung around very long. They did not. No great church was formed there. Its significance lay in it being a port.

Having reached the end of one part of the journey, Paul is left with the question, where next? What is the next part of the journey? Far from his options being narrowed down, they had

just been increased tenfold. That is the significance of Troas. It was a place of multiple destinations. In life we often find ourselves in 'Troas'. We ask ourselves. We ask God. Where next? Troas was not a dead end. It was a place of possibilities.

I don't want to make too much about the specifics of Paul's dream, except to say this. God speaks and Paul was open to God. In asking the question, 'where next', he was listening for God. He was tuned in, and God was able to reveal the next stage of the journey. That can't have been easy. There had been so many dead ends, but he kept on listening and he kept on going. Did he ever ponder the idea, let's go back. Let's just go home. This is just too hard. In the midst of our confusions and our anxieties, let us know that God is with us, and God has a plan.

How often have we travelled in the car, thinking we will never get to where we are going? You keep looking at your watch. We should have been there by now. Have we missed that all important turn off and how relieved we have been to see the sign post for our destination. For Paul, his final destination, on this part of the journey, was not Troas, but sign posted in his dream, to be Macedonia.

All of us, I think, need some kind of conformation that where we are, is right. It is not just about the journey. As pilgrim people that is important. It is also about what happens when we get to our destination. So we hold in tension this pilgrim walk

with God, journeying in faith and hope, and, what God asks of us, in the places we journey to and the people we meet there. In this story, it is the action of God, in the life of Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth, that affirms to Paul, his call to Macedonia and the mission of God in that place. But for that to happen, the journey had to be taken to get there.

I believe what is more interesting and important for us is this; this story is not about the work of Paul. It is about the journey of Paul, to the place where he will meet with God, who is already ahead of him.

We don't need to travel across great continents to meet with God. His spirit already lives and breathes in our communities. That is where we will find God.

God is both with us on the journey, and there to meet us at our destination. It was the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, who said, *"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"*

Each step of the journey, God is there. Each step, Christ walks with us. Each step, the spirit guides, and at journey's end, we meet with God. Amen.