

**Date: 7/4/2019**  
**Occasion: Lent 5, St James**  
**Service: 8.00 and 10.00. eucharist**

**Readings: Our heart: 1 Chronicles 16:23-31, Romans 12:1-2, John 4:20-24**

**Travelling.**

They say travel broadens the mind, but I'm not so sure.

Some years ago, after a cycling accident in Normandy, Kate and I were travelling from Cherbourg to Poole. On the journey out, we had shared the buzz of excitement and anticipation around the ferry. On the way back, while we were discussing the kindness of hoteliers, householders the Cherbourg staff of Brittany ferries, the consensus was less than positive about the experience of France: mayonnaise on chips for goodness sake, and thin chips at that! Too much garlic and too few people willing or able to speak English. It was almost as bad as all that Welsh being spoken in Pwllheli – almost, because we all know that Welsh people always speak English except when there are English people around.

In this morning's reading from John, Jesus is in Samaria and once the woman at the well recognises his accent, she assumes certain things about his attitude towards her, rather as I suspect many Welsh people do when they hear an English accent. Characteristically, Jesus challenges this by accepting her assumptions about him: you do this, he says, and we do that, you find sacred places here, we have Jerusalem (where incidentally, he was heading). Oh, and by the way, how are all your husbands? She expected to be on the receiving end of this Jew's disapproval and has begun accordingly. Jesus doesn't dodge this. Instead, he confronts it and by doing so he takes the conversation somewhere else entirely: to the possibility of discovering God's abiding concern to speak transforming words of love into her particular life and circumstances.

Jesus takes her expectations and gently turns them on their head and in doing so allows the woman to see beyond her expectations, her

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assumptions – based no doubt on bitter experience of others – and opens up a space in her heart for the truth of love to enter.

This is an instance of his travel broadening her mind. It is also an instance of how we can learn about the power – and the danger – of assumptions.

It's fair to say that plenty of people have assumptions about what Christians think. I've lost count of the times when I have met people who have pretty much told me that I should disapprove of them: because they live in sin (for goodness sake, does ANYONE still think like that?)

Or because they don't go to church – though this is often accompanied by an explanation that they used to go to Sunday school. Poor things! I want to tell them that if their experience of Sunday School was like mine, they don't need to say another word. I want to tell them that it is a minor miracle that I embraced Christianity as an adult after those dreary Sunday mornings in a dreary church hall listening to the local bs conductor trying to speaking of the love of Jesus, while his eyes appeared full of plans for ghastly punishments for us, his infant torturers

What he didn't realise, in fairness, was that we took out on him what we couldn't say or do to Miss Holt, our teacher at the Infant school.

Or because, well life is so busy these days. Which of course it is.

The point being that one of the lessons of this morning's reading from John is that Jesus travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem, to travel the way of the cross, opens up the possibility of **his** travels opening **our** minds to the possibility that if we but listen and learn, people will begin to make the assumption that being a Christian is not about condemnation, but celebration, of being known – really known – by God and being loved in a way that we can never allow ourselves to love ourselves. Which is quite something.