

Before each gospel reading, allow one verse to stay with you at the end of the reading, and I'll leave a moment for you to reflect on that before I continue.

Monday: Anxiety (Chapter 13)

In December last year I took my Advent retreat, as I always do. Usually I go to a Franciscan monastery on the Northumberland coast, but they were closed for maintenance, so I went back to Keswick in the Lake District for four days of walking and praying. Before I went, I asked my spiritual director - who I have been seeing for at least twenty years - for any advice on what I might read. How about the farewell discourses in John's gospel, chapters 13-16, he said. So I took a chapter a day, and when I came back and talked about it, Nitano suggested my reflections might offer a framework for these addresses. What I have to say will be quite personal, but I hope and pray it will have some resonance for all of us, in whatever transitions we may find ourselves caught up in.

The journey to the Lake District took me on the train via New Street to Penrith, where I had to wait for a bus in the light drizzle. I was excited to see a bus already at the stand outside the station, as I was expecting to have to wait - but it turned out it was the previous service which had broken down. I had already begun my spiritual journey through John 13 on the train, reading how Jesus was anxious about the transition that was to come, and reflecting on my own anxieties in the face of leaving - and not knowing (as I still don't) quite where I was going to be living, or what I was going to be doing. (I should mention for any visitors that the framework for the retreat, and these reflections, was that I am heading for retirement from this role in May, very soon.)

Jesus knew that his hour had come, and was gathered with his disciples for the last time. John's gospel has this on the night before the passover, whilst for the other gospel writers it is on the night of the passover itself. The details are not so important for us. Of significance is that everyone in that room knew something was happening, and that everything would be different - and for everyone this was a time of anxiety. Our natural instinct may be to think of the disciples, and we will return to their anxieties in due course - they probably haven't yet grasped the enormity of what's about to happen. Instead, our focus this evening is on Jesus himself.

It may seem surprising that Jesus could be anxious, but in v21 we read that Jesus was "troubled in Spirit". It's the same word from the gospel account of the death and rising of Lazarus, as Jesus responds to the distress of Lazarus's sisters and the impact of their brother's death, perhaps the ultimate reality of death for all of us. He rails against it. He, he faces the reality of making that very personal journey himself, and it's going to begin very soon, as he prepares to leave those he loves and go out into the night, the unknown.

As I reflect on my own leaving, I've found thinking about Jesus' leaving has been poignant. But Jesus was born to live out a human life and human experience, so it's okay to see in him a mirror of our own experience. If Jesus was anxious, it's okay for us to be anxious. And as I made my way into Keswick, the part of this account that struck me most powerfully was that Jesus knew he would be betrayed - whether wilfully, like Judas, or through a sheer lack of nerve, like Peter. Perhaps Judas thought he was doing the right thing, perhaps not. But Jesus knew that he could not control what would happen after he left, even amongst those whom he loved and who loved him. And what's more, he knew that somehow through these acts of betrayal, God's greater purposes would be fulfilled. As Judas goes out into the darkness, Jesus turns to the eleven, and says, "now has the Son of Man been glorified." Throughout these chapters, we hear God calling to us through the Spirit - this is my story, not yours, you need to trust me.

In Keswick I found my guest house, was warmly welcomed, and in a brief patch of sunshine decided to head out for a walk. After all, weather in the Lake District is volatile - and that's an optimistic view - so you take your chances as they appear. I'd identified a short circuit of a few miles down to the lake, up over the modest Castlehead viewpoint, and then cross country to the Castlerigg Stone Circle. I was less than half way there when the rain started. More or less

protected by my rain gear I struggled on, cutting the odd corner by climbing fences and soaking my freshly bought new boots in the waterlogged path. I made it to the circle, atmospheric in the mist and imagined the mighty backdrop of Blencathra, completely invisible in the low cloud. By the time I got back, me and my small backpack were extremely wet, but I was launched on the journey of the retreat. No one ever said it was easy, as Coldplay once sang - but no one ever said it would be this hard.

Nobody said it was easy
No one ever said it would be this hard
Oh, take me back to the start

That's from a song called the Scientist, about the end of a relationship. There's another of their songs, which comes to mind, a beautiful song about Chris Martin taking his child to school for the first time:

And the hardest part was letting go, not taking part
Was the hardest part
And the strangest thing was waiting for that bell to ring
It was the strangest start

I could feel it go down
Bittersweet I could taste in my mouth
Silver lining the clouds
Oh, and I
I wish that I could work it out

This is a time for leaving, for me - but everyday each of us face our own leavings in different ways, as our journeys take us forward.

Jesus' guidance for the future laces through this and all the following chapters: it's found here in verse 34. After reminding his disciples that they can't follow him, he commands them to love one another. This way of being together is to be the defining characteristic of the community he has created. Demonstrated in acts of mutual service like the washing of feet, to which we will return in our liturgy on Thursday. This is who they are to be. I like to think that's reflected in our first and last Cathedral values, hospitality and community - serving one another and those who join us. By making space for one another, we make space for God, and allow God to come into our midst and calm our fears. As we look to God in trust, and others in service, we allow God to care for us, in whatever is to come.

So the evening, like these addresses, has begun, and as Jesus and his disciples look at each other they're trying to work it out ... something's happening, but what is it?

Tuesday: Assurance (Chapter 14)

Welcome back, as we make our way through these chapters from St. John's Gospel, known as the farewell discourses. Any association with my own leaving is entirely intentional, as I share some reflections born out my Advent retreat, when my spiritual director encouraged me to spend time with these chapters as a way of framing my prayers for us all coming into this time of transition.

I spent my retreat last year in Keswick, and after breakfast in my second day, set out from the guest house intending to walk around the Lake. However, looking up between the houses I could see that Skiddaw, the third highest peak in the region and indeed the country, was, very unusually, free of cloud. There was even a little patch of sun. I was tired after trudging through the rain the previous day, and it seemed ambitious from a standing start, but it seemed too good an opportunity to miss. I bought a substantial sandwich and a flapjack, and off I went up Spooney Green Lane and across the lower slopes of Latrigg. It's not a difficult mountain to climb, but it's steep, actually it's very steep, and as I went with decreasing speed I wasn't sure I would make it. The sun, inevitably, disappeared and well before the summit I was surrounded by cloud and buffeted by a fierce icy wind. But just as you get near the top, the path levels along an airy wide ridge and the cloud cleared just enough for me to see the mountains around me, and down to the town and the lake below.

It was a bit of an exercise in perseverance and endurance. But when I finally got back down, I remembered a card from my wife Ricarda I still have at my bedside with the text, "you are not too old and it is not too late!" More than that, I had been given another glimpse of God in those views down into the valley below. That morning's Psalm was Ps 80, one of my favourites. It has a four fold refrain, "Turn us again, O God; show us the light of your countenance and we shall be saved." Each time it builds, adding a little more about God, and once reversing it to refer to God turning to us, rather than turning us too himself: "Turn us again, O God of hosts; show us the light of your countenance and we shall be saved." "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts; show us the light of your countenance and we shall be saved." And in the middle, "Turn again, O God of hosts, look down from heaven and behold." I felt God turning me back to him, and God to me. Like the Kendal mint cake I had forgotten to take, this was what would sustain me for the journey.

That view took me back. Staff in the Cathedral may recall that early in my time here I often spoke about an image of getting the Cathedral back on track, especially financially, being like driving a bus over the Honister Pass in the ice. Honister is not far from Keswick, and I've tried to drive over it in winter, more than once giving up and gingerly making my way back down. In the metaphor, we needed to get a grip on the road, through proper financial management, and then make sure we had the right people on the bus - a familiar image from management theory. (Interesting that my spell check assumed I was trying to write management theology!) Finally, after a few years, I was able to say that we had made it to the top, and my work consultant and my wife both asked me, "where are you going now?" My immediate answer was Buttermere - which is at the bottom on the other side of the pass, via an equally scary windy downhill route. But then, after another few years, we were in my mind camped out by the Fish Inn near the banks of Buttermere, and once again asking, 'where now'. The answer was the landing stages at Keswick, a magical and beautiful place near the monument to John Ruskin declaring the adjacent view from Friar's Crag one of the finest in the world. In my mind this is where we have arrived together in our journey over the last thirteen years, a magical place for you - but not me - to enjoy. I was reminded in the perspective of that climb up Skiddaw of that magical place to which we have arrived together.

Jesus had arrived in a magical place with his disciples. Reclining around him, it could have been perfect, but like all such places this side of his return it was not for ever. And he began to share with his disciples, trying to help them understand that although he had shown them the way, the truth, and the life, it was actually not all about him, it was all about the Father

As he left, Jesus pointed the disciples to the Father. And not just to the Father, but to the Holy Spirit. This has to be one of the most deeply Trinitarian areas of all of scripture. v.26: "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and

remind you of all that I have said to you.” Jesus is the Word who shows the Way, but the Way is to God, and the Spirit is there to guide and empower them for that journey of obedience to the Word which Jesus embodies. He is the Word, and speaks the Word, to those who look to him. His way is the way of love — and the Spirit is love. We may hear Christians speak of a Spirit of Power, and so he is, but we should also recall (as so often) St. Leonard: “Love is not a victory march”. My last Sunday, as it happens, is the Sunday after Ascension in the church’s liturgical year - the Sunday when we could look back to everything Jesus did, but instead are compelled to look ahead to the coming of the Spirit, that Spirit of love who will lead us forward.

I’ve called this evening’s address, Assurance, but it may seem a strange sort of assurance in the face of the final verses. The journey Jesus calls us on may be as challenging as the climb I decided to embrace on the second day of my retreat. Or perhaps God pushed me up that mountain? Whatever, it was hard. As I said last night, “nobody ever said it was easy - nobody ever said it would be this hard.” But as I sat in a small bar in Keswick in the evening with a pint and a pizza, reading this chapter of St. John, I felt God speak to me for myself and all of us: “Peace I leave with you; my Peace I give to you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.” That phrase comes twice in this chapter, did you notice? In verse 1 and again in verse 27: it’s something Jesus, and John, really want us to notice. Believe in God, believe also in me.

However hard it is, it’s God’s journey we are called into. In verse 30, Jesus warns the disciples that “the Ruler of this world is coming”. It sounds a little terrifying, and speaks into the reality of the chaos that is about to unfold in Jerusalem in those days, as the world takes its course. But he continues to say, the world has no power over me ... I will fulfil God’s purposes, hard though it may be.

The final verse, 31, suggests the end of the conversation, “Rise, let us be on our way.” We recognise that sometimes it’s time to move on. But Jesus still has a few more things to say, as we will discover over the next two days.

Wednesday: The long journey (Chapter 15)

After the lovely assurances of Chapter 14, and the apparent completion of Jesus' final words to the disciples, it may seem a surprise that the Gospel account starts up again. And another thing, Jesus says ... and as they prepare to set out into the night, he turns to his disciples and says, "we are like a vine". It's as though we are all part of the same living plant, joined to me, and filled with my life ... and the life of this plant, this vine, is going to continue, you know – but it's not going to be easy. Pruning will be part of it. And training, of course – training as in training for a race, but also as in training to a shape, according to a framework, for a life of loving service in obedience to God for the sake of the world. And that takes time. [recap the shape of the retreat]

Yesterday you heard me describe how on day two of my Keswick retreat I found myself climbing a high mountain. But perhaps I still hadn't found what I was looking for. Actually, I really thought I had, but I was still there in the Lake District so what should do? Go for a walk, of course, and so on day three off I set around the lake, as I originally intended the previous day. But just to walk around the lake would perhaps be a bit feeble, and by the time I staggered back into Keswick that evening I had covered over 18 miles and climbed 158 floors according to my iPhone health app. I had idly rested and stayed, or rather paused, by the not so still waters flowing under Ashness Bridge, seen glorious views over Derwentwater on the way to Watendlath, where I had enjoyed sandwiches on a bench under an umbrella, exchanged greetings with a random visitor lost on top of Castle Crag who turned out to be a Sky Blues through and through fan from Coventry, and made my way home in the dark listening to Evening Prayer on my AirPods.

As with many journeys through familiar country, this was also a journey through my own history, revisiting the roots and winding growth of my own vocation and prayers. As you may well know, my first wife and the mother of my three children died almost 27 years ago. You may not know that when she died, I was taking a break with the children in the Lake District in a cottage we had often stayed in as a family. Mo was in respite care near our home in Nottingham, with very advanced multiple sclerosis. I was woken up around 7.00 one very sunny morning with a knock on the door from the owner of the post office in the village, with a message to call home. There was no mobile phone signal, and so I went down the lane to the phone box with my twelve year old daughter, to speak to my father, who told me that Mo had died in the night. After waking the other children, unsure what to do, we spent the remainder of the day on and around Derwentwater, climbing Catbells and kayaking, doing some of the things we had enjoyed together, before travelling home the following day. My walk took me down that same lane, past that same phone box, and on around the same lake. I had honestly forgotten that it would until I found myself next to it. It was, as you would imagine, a moment.

Our lives are made up of journeys, external and internal, some with others and some on our own. Through these journeys, God forms us as the people he wants us to be. You've probably heard me say quite often that I was given advice when I came to the Cathedral thirteen years ago that all I should aim to do was to "be myself and say my prayers," and that I start every day with the prayer, "God help me to be who you need me to be, and do what you need me to do", sometimes adding, "and be where you want me to be." God has chosen us (v16), as God chose the disciples - not anyone else - and God leads us and forms each of us through life for the place we find ourselves. That's certainly been true for me in the Cathedral, with its calling to reconciliation. As we make our way through the paths of our days, sometimes easy, sometimes hard - sometimes harder than we could possibly have imagined - we learn how to discover God speaking to us and guiding us, providing for us and caring for us and about us, in ways that prepare us for all that's still to come. And we learn things that may occasionally be of help to others too. Jesus is reminding the disciples of these things as they set out from this Upper Room.

I've just come back from South Africa, where it seemed that two out of every three people with whom I spent significant time, often those giving me hospitality, had shared my experience of losing a first wife through bereavement, and the joys and challenges of forming a new family with a new partner, often bringing children from former families into a new home. Twenty six years on, married to Ricarda with our five children shared between us I can gently but confidently offer hope

and the assurance of God's grace from my own experience. How often that is the case, not to impose our story on others, but to resonate with them in theirs.

How has your journey prepared you for the place where you are? Who are you now? Where have you come from? Perhaps especially, how have the hard parts prepared you, formed you in wisdom, character, endurance, hope. How have you learned to be open to the sustaining work of the Spirit in the midst of the struggles, personal or political, internal or external? And what fruit have they enabled you to bear? Fruit born of endurance, of maturity.

We might want to describe these struggles as like pruning. Certainly they can feel quite brutal. I don't know if you've ever had a vine? We had one, growing over a trellis outside the rather lovely living room window in the Edwardian vicarage we lived in when we were in Gloucester, before coming to Coventry. Each year I would prune it back, and in the wake of pruning it would literally pour sap from the cut branches, as though we had turned on a tap, almost as though it was bleeding. But that was the strength of the vine - it had so much life during through it, it was like the strength of Jesus' life pouring through us as we live our lives as Christians keeps us connected to him and to one another. Cutting back enables new growth in ways and directions we might not have anticipated. And the fruit is there to nourish us and others.

John chapter 15 starts with this lovely, vigorous image of the vine - but it moves very quickly into the reality of pruning. It's as though Jesus is saying, our time together may have felt like a vine, extending its vigorous and beautiful growth across this land, perhaps across the whole world. But tough times are coming, and the vine is going to need some training to do all that God intends.

Yet through all this, what will keep that sap flowing through the vine is the love the disciples have for one another - that love which is in fact the Spirit, the Spirit of truth and love. That is what will hold them on track. The love of God which is life itself, flowing through the branches of the vine, and out into the whole world, pouring itself into the fruit that the vine bears for nourishment and celebration.

We are in that vine, joined whether we like it to one another, joined by God's choice to Jesus – where will it take us?

[On Wednesday last week I was in Canterbury Cathedral for the installation of Archbishop Sarah Mullaly. She has coined a phrase for the Anglican Communion which we can take for ourselves this Wednesday evening, although it's poignant given all that is still to come: if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together. Sometimes we have to walk alone, but it's better to walk together.]

Thursday: Courage (Chapter 16)

We're here on Maundy Thursday, but I've been following through the four chapters of 'farewell discourses in John's Gospel chapters 13-16 through this last Holy Week that I will spend as Dean in the Cathedral. As we have been looking at these chapters, we are able to see again how Jesus shares our human experience of life, including the anxiety around times of transition and leaving.. On this last evening he is to spend with his disciples before his death, we have seen how not just the disciples but even Jesus himself are anxious, troubled in Spirit. A journey is well under way, but is not yet completed, and the end will be the hardest part.

As we have looked at these Chapters together, I've been relating something of my own journey as I spent time reading them on my Advent retreat in the Lake District at the end of last year, and how they helped me reflect on my time here at the Cathedral as I prepare to leave. This evening, we will be returning in our liturgy to the beginning of the passages, as I follow Jesus' role in washing feet, a time honoured sign of the leader of a Christian community taking the role of a servant, reminding us that all of us, wherever we see ourselves in the community, share this calling to serve one another. No exceptions. No special treatment or get out clauses.

So if you've just joined the journey through this Holy Week today, welcome - and if you've been travelling with me all week, welcome again. We are approaching the time when Jesus turns from talking with the disciples to speaking with his heavenly father, recorded in chapter 17, asking him in the great high priestly prayer to care for them as he prepares to leave them, trusting them into God's hands. (I've just discovered that I the passage set in the lectionary for my actual service in a few weeks time.) But tonight we've heard chapter 16, with its predictions of suffering and sorrow, but also the call to have courage, right at the end of the chapter.

Whenever I come across the call to have courage, I'm reminded of one of our core texts from the Cathedral, quoted here and around the world: "You have never really engaged in the work of reconciliation until your own people think that you have betrayed them." In my powerpoint presentations, it's accompanied by a photograph of my saintly predecessor, Provost Dick Howard, speaking on the radio from the ruins on Christmas Day 1940, and titled, "Courage". It took courage for Dick Howard to speak out against any thought of revenge in the weeks following the destruction of the Cathedral, beloved as it was not just by the church but by the city - and some, I guess, never forgave him. Neither the city, nor the church.

As I prepared to leave the guest house in Keswick at the end of my retreat, I started the day with holy communion in the parish church, led by an elderly priest who I didn't get to speak to, and attended by a small group of elderly faithful. Next to me on my left was a polished brass plaque on the wall: *In loving memory of loving memory of Robert Halley Knight, Captain Wiltshire Regiment. Born in this parish 19 December 1892, killed in Palestine 19 September 1918. Giving his life in the service of God and country he helped to free the Holy Land from the cruel oppression of centuries and the world from the dominion of the power of evil. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace goodwill towards men."* Goodness - what to make of that? The journeys we make and our understanding of them will often be obscure to us, and things that once seemed clear may in retrospect be much more opaque. We play the part we've been given, and leave later generations to judge us. Or perhaps more helpfully, God.

Waiting at the bus shelter by Fitz Park to travel back to Penrith to catch the train, in the drizzling rain, another traveller was kind to assure me I hadn't missed it. Later, as the train made its way south over Shap summit (much better in the train than in the car) I realised I was anxious about the return. Ministry here in the Cathedral has been the privilege and joy of my life, but it's also been hard - and often because following the call of Jesus to welcome all, to count everyone in, to make space for everyone - has not always gone down well either with the city, or, more often, the church. The calling to be true to who God has called us to be here is costly, for all of us.

Jesus speaks to his disciples in these closing moments of his time with them, warning them that they will receive opposition. They will put you out of the synagogues, he says: God's own people

will not recognise what you are saying in my name. An hour is coming, he says, when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. In America today, there are preachers calling for the faithful to murder those who oppose, in Jesus' name, the exclusion of immigrants and refugees. Yet, Jesus says, I will send the Holy Spirit, the advocate, to guide you and strengthen you, not for the first time in these chapters. Looking to the uncertainties of the future - in a little while you won't be able see me, in a little while you will again - hold fast, take courage, we're not at the end. I love that line from the Exotic Marigold Hotel, "it will be alright in the end, and if it's not alright, it's not the end."

Several people have suggested that I have changed the Cathedral – an idea I resist, to some extent, because I think I've helped us back to our core vocation. But I was asked the other day how the Cathedral had changed me, which I found a very interesting question – and my answer was somewhat the same. The Cathedral has helped me become who God has called me to be. And I hope, whether you are here as part of the Cathedral or part of Holy Trinity, that you can see how you have played a part in shaping your community, just as your community has played a part in shaping you. Just as Jesus shaped the community of his disciples and they will have shaped him ... Without having feet to wash, how could Jesus have shown us how to wash feet. We are shaped by one another. I trust that we have all played a part in helping one another become who God is calling us to be, both for now, and in preparation for all that's to come.

I don't know what is next for me, which is a little strange. When I told Andy Waddams, the diocesan comms director, that I didn't know what retirement would mean he was quite excited - but he's always excited, and always encouraging. "Great," he said, "you're leaning into uncertainty, that will be really encouraging for people to read!" Because many of feel uncertain about ourselves or our world, but we hang on to God. And it may take time before we know.

Where has your journey led you? What's now, and what's next for you? Jesus has travelled with his disciples through Judea and Galilee, throughout what we call Palestine, and as they face these final chapters, they are all anxious. Not just the disciples, Jesus too. His final words are these, "You will be scattered, and you will leave me alone: Yet I am not alone because my Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world."

Hold fast. Take courage. We travel on, and we do not travel alone. God is faithful, and he will do it.

Now to the one who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. Eph 3. 20,21