

DON'T LOOK BACK; LOOK FORWARD. Pentecost 4, 2025 All Souls' dtw

From our Prayer of the Day: God of the covenant, in our baptism you called us to proclaim the coming of your kingdom: give us courage, as you gave it to the apostles, that we may faithfully witness to your love and peace in every circumstance in life.

A good friend of mine who is interstate confided in me that he was seriously considering a big change in his career and a very challenging appointment. He had become so convinced that this appointment had his name written all over it that he said quite emphatically to me, "David, I have set my face to this". As I listened to him, I needed to be quite clear in my mind about his motives; I needed to discern the reasons for his absolute certainty, particularly because he had been very disappointed and hurt about a previous position he had held. He was still looking back and nursing his wounds when he really needed to be free to move on to God's future unconstricted by the past.

As I continued to listen to my friend who is a committed Christian, I felt prompted to say to him. "You have set your face to this. Those are the words you have used. Jesus set his face to Jerusalem. For Jesus, this meant not only accomplishment, but a cross; not only fulfilment but suffering. I think you would be great for the task as long as you know that it may not be easy; there may be struggles and difficulties as well as achievements and wonderful rewards. But first, you must be absolutely sure that the past is behind you and that the affirming wind of God is at your back". He was grateful for my cautious encouragement.

I believe that too many of us carry unnecessary baggage from the past. I have. The road to God's Kingdom is narrow and requires little luggage and mainly faith, hope and love. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the seventy : "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.." (Lk 10.4) The Dalai Lama visited Adelaide some years ago. I didn't go to see him then, but I had the joy of meeting him at the cathedral in Perth many years ago. He travels light. He longs for his Tibet, but the longing does not constrain him. He has not looked back. China's loss has been the world's gain. His possessions are simple: they are the best things in life, which are free. He giggles a lot. I think Jesus giggled too, especially about all the strings that are attached to our little lives, strings that restrain and confine; strings that make us so serious and absurdly unadventurous. Here is just one of the secrets of the kingdom - not to look back – just forward, with no strings attached. And when Jesus set his face to Jerusalem with the affirming wind of the Father at his back, Calvary's loss became the world's gain!

This parish is in a time of transition in terms of the future. We have been in dialogue with another parish, but nothing is fixed in concrete. It is a time of stocktaking, refocussing, much discussion, and some restlessness. Coles Hall is to be sold, and we will be building new facilities alongside Kay Hall and the rear of our church. A beautiful new garden is being established. What lies ahead? What does our Jerusalem

look like? We are all in this together, and to quote our Gospel again, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few...” It is not an easy task. But we have the assurance of Christ that God is in charge, God will supply and equip, every step of the way. This is kingdom business, kingdom enterprise, and nothing can stand in our way.

Once more planning and dialogue is done, then guided by the Spirit, and confirmed by the body of Christ in this parish, we are called to set our face afresh to a new Jerusalem – without flinching, whatever the cost, whatever it looks like. And, as for the Christ we follow, this will entail sacrifice as well as accomplishment, struggle as well as triumph. There is no point dwelling on the past; there is no point regretting what might have been. There are no short cuts, no quick fixes. But Jesus never lost sight of the big picture, the Kingdom picture. Neither should we.

In God’s meantime, we are called to walk gently, patiently, joyfully and kindly with each other and to listen deeply; truly to discern the mind of God. We have each been given one tongue and two ears. Perhaps that means we need to do twice the listening than talking, meaning another fruit of the Spirit to exercise, which is self-control...and hopefully, like the Dalai Lama, a sense of humour. Don’t look back; look forward. I wrote this poem in 2013 when I was off work with some time to reflect:

*Looking back
do you see some daft moments
when you must have totally
lost the plot and had a
brain freeze?*

*Looking back
do you wish you’d had the insight
to know you were barking
up the wrong tree
without a prayer?*

*Looking back
were you too impatient
to see the big picture;
driven to distraction with
fleeting fancies?*

*Looking back
you can’t change a thing and
‘the benefit of hindsight’
is poor consolation for
your mistakes.*

*Looking back:
what’s the point?
All you’ll really get at best
is a sore neck or at worst*

a pillar of salt.