

Pastoral letter from Helen – LINK magazine July 2019

During the recent half term school holidays, Andrew and I went on a pilgrimage. We never really set out to go on a pilgrimage; we set out to have a walking holiday following the route of St Cuthbert's way, which begins at Melrose in the Scottish borders and ends at Lindisfarne, 64 miles later.

We had worn in our boots, bought good socks (a real necessity evidently), read all of the maps and booked our accommodation along the way, as well as tickets for the relevant trains. But despite our preparation, things did not always go to plan:

One of our trains was cancelled and the next train so full we ended up crammed into a carriage going to Berwick upon Tweed with a crowd of young men dressed as Hobbits (don't ask!)

After our first day walking Andrew injured his knee and so we had to spend the next day navigating public transport in the borders of Scotland to find some treatment.

The B&B's we stayed in were all unique I am being polite; there are too many stories to tell!

And we both realised that maybe we should have practised walking up few more hills as neither of us were as young as we thought!

However, for all the things did not go to plan, we had the privilege of walking every day through a beautiful and varied landscape; of seeing a rich variety of birds and bugs and hearing only their songs, as the rest of the world did not encroach here. Every day we had a deep sense of God's presence with us.

Of course, another joy was those we travelled with, who like us were walking 'the way'. We shared our week with people from Denmark, Holland, Australia, Canada, and from all over Britain. With this eclectic group we walked and laughed, talked and disagreed, shared food and experiences, occasionally cried, and then, because that was the nature of the week put on our boots again and started the next day's walking. The whole point of the week was that we could not stay in one place – we had to go on to the next destination whether we felt like it or not.

Eventually we all caught our separate trains home but we were all a little bit changed. That is the nature of pilgrimage.

It made me think about the shared journey that is ministry and the life of the church. I am grateful for the last 5 years that Andrew and I have shared with you all at Aylesbury. For your hospitality, your stories, love, grace, laughter and friendship; for your openness to share your vulnerabilities and willingness to challenge us when we have got things wrong. A shared journey in the presence of God.

And now we now look to start new journeys, as you welcome the Atkinsons and Andrew and I begin a new phase of ministry in the Chester & Stoke District. It is the nature of being God's people that we are always journeying, moving forward together and in the presence of God. So, thank you for sharing this journey with us; it might not always have gone to plan but we have never doubted God's presence, and I can honestly say that we have been changed by your ministry to us. So, thank you!

May God's blessing be realised in our lives as we continue our pilgrimage in his name. (And if you are ever 'up north' we'd love to see you!)

*May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,
wherever He may send you.*

*May He guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm.*

*May He bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders He has shown you.*

*May He bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.*

Helen.

