

# MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

*(John 15.12-17, Romans 12.1-2)*

It's a bit unusual for me to be asked to stand up here and talk about me! I'd much rather be talking about Jesus and about God. But of course, my spiritual journey is just as much about God and about Jesus as it is about me. My experience is that God has been an active participant in my story, even if I didn't realise it at the time.

Jeremiah wrote this to the exiles in Babylon: *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"*. [You might have heard that at the outdoor Godzone]. And in our first reading, Jesus says to the disciples at the last supper: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit"*. You did not choose me, but I chose you.

So God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit want to play an active role in our spiritual journeys, if we will but let them. My problem in coming to faith, quite late in life in my late 30's was that for a long time I couldn't see God's plan for my life, or realise Jesus was choosing me.

It all started promisingly enough. I was baptised as a baby. I have vague memories of going to Sunday school. I was confirmed in my early teens, I fainted at early communion through not having breakfast. I even went along to meetings of the Crusaders Union in a neighbour's house. But sadly, I never got what it was all about. I never got how much God loves me. I never got that Jesus died for me personally on the cross. I never heard about the Holy Spirit.

Then I went way to university and immersed myself in the wonders of science, and began to find it difficult to believe in God altogether. I was bothered by questions like "who created the creator", questions I now know to be simply the wrong questions. Essentially I became an atheist.

Then Janet and I married, and my job with ICI eventually brought us to Eaglescliffe. Janet had been to church at university, and a friend

encouraged her to go to All Saints'. Things then started to take a strange turn. I was happy to go along with Janet, even though I didn't really believe in God, and I actually started to get something out of it. I became an Anglican atheist. [I later found out about the "Sea of Faith" movement which really did believe God was a human construct with no external reality.]

This was just before the time of Mission England in the 1980's, and unknown to me at the time, a triplet started to pray for me. Then a new couple came to All Saints', and started up a prayer partnership scheme, where people would pair up to pray together every couple of weeks. Not knowing that I wasn't a Christian (well they wouldn't would they), they asked me to take part. And here it gets really strange, for some unearthly, incomprehensible reason I said yes.

So it came about that I ended up with Brian Wake, praying to a God I didn't believe in that he would help me to believe. Totally out of character for me, totally illogical. Afterwards, Brian suggested that I try reading a book by C S Lewis, called *Mere Christianity*, a book that had been in our house all along.

So I read that book, and suddenly it all made sense, I believed that what Christianity claimed must be true after all. But it dawned on me that if it was true, it was the most important thing in all the world. It demanded putting following Jesus first. It demanded a complete rethink of my life. A complete review of my priorities. That brings us to our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans: *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will"*.

One of the consequences of having a powerful conversion experience quite late in life, is that you are forced to think through the consequences. What did God want me to do next? What gifts had he given me to be used for the building up of the church? Carry on at work or do something full time? Get ordained? It took quite a while to work it all out.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that Jesus gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and some teachers. Some of

you may remember the pentagon in "life-shapes". And when I did the life-shapes pentagon questionnaire, I come out as part teacher, and part apostle, which seemed to fit with the experiences of my spiritual journey.

Teacher is fairly obvious, because I like to get to the bottom of things, and I'm quite good at explaining them. Apostle is a bit harder to get your head round, but in today's context it really means some sort of pioneering ministry. That's how we came to go from All Saints' to boost the struggling little congregation meeting in the Orchard Community Centre. And when St John's Egglecliffe wound that up, we felt called to come to Long Newton, where there were signs of new growth, rather than go back to All Saints'.

And now I'm getting on a bit, our family circumstances are changing, my powers are beginning to wane, so my journey is more about what to let go of, and how to be more selective about where I put what energy I still have.

But I believe that as my spiritual journey takes a new turn, God still has plans for me, plans to prosper me and not harm me, plans to give me hope and a future, even though I'm not sure what those plans are. And because Jesus chose me, and appointed me that I might go and bear fruit, there is still fruit to bear, even though I don't yet know what it is.

And that's true of all of us. God has plans for all of us, plans to prosper us and not harm us, plans to give us hope and a future. And Jesus chose all of us, and appointed us that we all might go and bear fruit. We just need to find out for ourselves what those plans and that fruit are.