

Address from Howard Friend for the Second Sunday of Easter

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

STOP - START

It's been the year for that - hasn't it

Stop - start – and then again but this time we're in Tiers – no pun intended – or perhaps so.

Then Stop a third time – and then we start again – but this time with a 'Road Map' and fortified by a jab in the arm.

And some have stopped altogether ~ 150,000 in the UK alone.

And we start to wonder what it's been all about.

Well - the short answer to that - is that various governments around the world have introduced Lockdowns as the sensible public health measure to deal with the Corona virus. And some have done it better than others – mainly because they stopped long and hard first and restarted only when it was sensible to do so.

When to stop – and how to start – that is the question or is it How to stop and when to start.

The Stop Start dilemma features prominently in our Old Testament reading as Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt towards the Promised Land.

They'd made a good start - eventually escaping from Pharaoh - but were now stopped on the Western banks of the Red Sea. Sea before them and an army behind them – and they were not a happy band of pilgrims.

Did Moses have a Road Map for the way forward? Perhaps not in the Johnsonian sense. But - like any sensible God fearing person – in a crisis – he realised he had to Stop.

Vs 13 / 14

And Moses said

Do not be afraid. Stand firm. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still. Caught in a very difficult position with many advocating a return to Slavery as the least worst outcome - being still was a tall order.

And we don't know exactly how long they stood still and reminded themselves that God was with them. But they did. They stood still. They stopped.

In my mind's eye I can almost see Moses like a patriarchal Lolly Pop man facing the Red Sea with the argumentative Israelites all around him and he patiently asking them to :

Stop - Look - Listen !

It's actually pretty good spiritual advice - not just for when you're crossing a busy road but especially for when you're facing a crisis.

– We have had plenty of opportunity during our Stops, our Lockdowns to Look and Listen

To Look to God in his Creation and in his written word and to listen to him in prayer and Meditation.

It's very important to Stop – Look and Listen in the spiritual realm before deciding on the way forward.

So in the middle of all this drama Moses says stop. Now comes the very interesting surprise. What did God say about this Stop that Moses had ordered?

Vs 15

God said to Moses, Why are you crying out to me. Tell the Israelites to move on.

In other words, Go Moses Go. Get your staff out and do your stuff. And you know what happened next. It wasn't a negotiated settlement for better conditions of service back in Egypt. It was Go, go forward.

Stop Look Listen Go

As we emerge from this Pandemic and the seemingly interminable Stop Starts I think there's a great danger for we Christians to get stuck in the Stop Look Listen phase and not move forward.

Do we really want to return to exactly the way we did things B C (Before Covid) ? What is the way forward.? That's an important question.

We need to ask ourselves what has worked for us during these Lockdowns - during these Stops - and build on that. Where is the Spirit moving amongst us? Perhaps some of those things we used to do but which we haven't missed – we could now leave behind.

We need to ask ourselves what new areas of ministry might God be calling us to. An important question for each of us to answer - and also for us as a church to consider. Stop, Look Listen then - Go

Good practice for Moses and the Israelites. Good too for us.

Some of us are rather better at stopping and discerning God's will. Others better and getting up and going. We do need each other. And we need to understand our differences.

Finally: What about Thomas. Many of us have a soft spot for 'doubting Thomas'.

I think it's fair to say he Stopped. He stopped believing – told his friends so. But he had the great advantage over us, who were not there, to a third sensory input to restart his faith

For Thomas it was:

Stop, Look, Listen - Touch - and then go. And boy did he go. Tradition has it he went all the way to India with the good news of the Risen Christ.

I leave you with a riddle:-

I think there are several possible answers which you may tell me, email or message to me

Why did the Christian never get to cross the road?!

(And I won't accept :- because he was chicken!)

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