

Sunday 29th September 2024 - This Little Light Of Mine: The Journey Home Together

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Preacher: Dave Moss

[0 : 00] So, I hope you're all well. Some are obviously not, it's that time of year. But probably like me, you've been waiting for summer to arrive.

We seem to have had a few days of sunshine and then that's it for this year. Perhaps despite the weather, you've had a chance to journey to new places. On holiday perhaps, or to visit friends. Or simply just to go around the corner to a place you've never been to before. Or perhaps, it's time just simply to be home. And simply enjoying your own space.

Chez nous is the French phrase used to describe home. You can often see it used as the name of a house in the UK or perhaps the name of a restaurant.

And the French gives that air of sophistication and a cosy feel. Chez nous cannot be easily translated as it has different layers of meaning.

[1 : 03] It can mean at our house, meaning the building where we live. Or it can mean with us, as in come round and be with us.

Or it can mean where we live or where we belong. Or it can simply mean our home, where we feel comfortable. A bit like the Northern English.

Are you coming round our house? Bethel is the name Jacob in the Bible gave the place where he wrestled with God. And it means house of God.

Beth, meaning house. And El, meaning God. This has also become a popular name to use, especially for independent churches all over the world.

This is a picture of Bethel Chapel in the village of Bethel in North Wales. So coming home is often associated with finding your place with God.

[2 : 07] For 27 years, this dashing young man had the privilege of being a teacher in a comprehensive school in Conway in North Wales.

It was, and still is, a large school of 1,200 pupils from ages 11 to 18. And the red outline on the map there shows the large sweep of the school catchment area.

Pupils were bussed in from the small towns and villages in the area. Many pupils had barely experienced much outside their local communities.

And coming to school on the bus was an adventure in itself. The school had the use of a restored cottage high up in the mountains nearby.

Simply a great place for young people to do their Duke of Edinburgh award, for example. And there are many great stories to tell here. So here's one. The teacher in charge took the group out walking on the mountains.

[3 : 09] And as they looked down onto the town below, he asked them where they thought it was. London, came a possible reply. Or could it be Liverpool?

After all, it looks so big. And no one actually guessed correctly. Well, this is Penmamar, he said. This is where some of you live.

The journey had not been very far, barely more than a mile. And yet they failed to recognise where they lived. There were some pupils in school who were well travelled.

I've been abroad, sir, I'd be told. Where's that? I'd ask. Spain, would come the answer. As though it was just a town somewhere. What happened when they caught a plane from an airport, they weren't sure which one, to a place called Spain.

And where they'd stayed in a hotel with a swimming pool near the beach. They'd eaten chicken nuggets and chips, and there was a disco. The only difference to anywhere else seemed to be that there was rather more sunshine than in North Wales.

[4 : 21] Here's that same dashing young man again, with a team of teachers responsible for getting pupils to look beyond themselves and the small world they were growing up in.

It's a great tie, and I used to have a really brilliant collection. As a French teacher, it was my mission to broaden perspectives and provide children with an understanding of a life beyond themselves. Every year, we took two coaches full of year eight pupils to France at May half term. And at Easter, we took two coaches of year ten pupils to Paris.

And every two years, we took the sixth form to Paris at February half term. The popularity of these experiences is a testimony to both parents and pupils who wanted their children to experience something different.

For many parents, this was a significant commitment financially. Money would arrive in coins in an envelope week by week, and weeks would be missed.

[5 : 27] Donations were given to fund others. It was a big commitment. There are many, many wonderful tales to tell again, and we spent many beautiful times exploring Normandy and Paris.

Once, when taking the sixth form to Paris, we took the train to London-Euston before transferring to a coach to take us to Paris. Look carefully as you cross the road, I said.

They drive fast, and there's lots of traffic here. But nobody had their eyes on the road. They were all looking up, up high. They asked, why are the buildings so tall?

You see, there was nothing above three stories high in North Wales. Might just be the case here in Burntwood too. On another occasion, we were on the coach heading for Dover, and we heard, sir, sir, I can see the Eiffel Tower.

Strange, I thought. We haven't even crossed the channel yet. And it was, of course, an electricity pad. But these stories, these misconceptions, all had one thing in common.

[6 : 36] The journey was exciting. There was things to be discovered. There was anticipation. Then, the day before the journey home, we always visited a hypermarket.

This is Carrefour in Caen, the one we actually visited. And again, more tales to tell. Before allowing them to shop, we gave them some good advice.

Some pupils had hardly spent anything, all week waiting for this big moment. They wanted to buy souvenirs, and of course, I told them to buy Chanel No. 5, their mothers, at 75 euros a bottle.

No, of course I did not. Of course I did not tell them that. Actually, they advised to buy something typically French. Most of it cost less than one euro. Some chocolate biscuits, a packet of sweets, a bar of chocolate, a pot of Dijon mustard, a jar of milk jam, or some grenadine syrup.

Ask me later if you're not sure what some of these things are. Or slightly more expensive, possibly two to three euros, a set of drinking glasses, or a French scarf.

[7 : 48] Children would therefore buy two or three presents. And of course, it was a clever ploy to check there was no contraband. What have you bought? We would ask.

Oh, these sweets for my brother, the grenadine for my dad, a scarf for my mum, and my gran loves mustard. Some brought drinking glasses, which we stored safely on the coach.

Goodness knows how much French glassware ended up in North Wales over the years. But you know what was so special? It was the coming home. Did you have a nice time?

We missed you. Yes, mum, it was great. This is for you. Who knew that a pot of mustard could make people so happy? In the New Testament times, most people didn't have the time or the means to travel far.

If they were to leave their home village, it would perhaps only be to the nearby desert. Let's listen to the opening verses of John's Gospel, a passage that we're more used to listening to at Christmastime.

[8 : 56] pulpitum and j Garden in an awesome great house. The song by DHA is called Bologna. Little McCarthy, pertama di little division by Bologna.

An important theme by a little■■■■ over to versions of the New Testament times, the point and human so as was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made.

Without Him, nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The light shines in the light.

[10 : 28] There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[11 : 40] The opening to John's gospel is like the start of a journey. We've come to a new place, to meet a friend who we think we know well.

In fact, John is about to reveal to us more about Jesus than we ever thought we knew. We're being introduced to the person of Jesus, who he was, who he is, and we will discover all that he did, and all that he promises, and all that's meant for us.

We're encouraged to take this journey together with others, for we're being led home to Bethel, to who and where God is. In the beginning was the word.

This takes us right back to Genesis, when God created the world. This is the continuing story of God and the world he has made. The creator God is acting in a new way, with his much-loved creation.

This is now the climax of the story, which the creator has always intended. In Genesis, when God spoke the word, the climax is the creation of human beings made in God's image.

[13 : 02] Here, the climax is the arrival of a human being. The word become flesh. Yes, flesh. This is a warm, cuddly baby who we can cuddle and hold and feel.

Yes, a warm, cuddly baby who wheeze and poos. God's word breathes real breath.

God's word brings life, life in all its fullness. Many still ask an age-old question to this very day. How can the one true God be both different from the world and active within the world?

And here he is. Well, God makes the journey. God could easily have remained distant, apart from humans. God could have remained unknowable, apart and far removed from our daily lives.

But he does not. God makes the journey to come to us. It is not us who have to go anywhere. God comes to us.

[14 : 19] He comes to where we are. He comes to our shenu. He comes to where we are, to be with us in the flesh as a human being.

God's word is not an abstract principle. It's a person. The person of Jesus. This very word, this very Jesus, travels to where we are, to the very darkness where we live, and to bring life and light.

Jesus' journey to us brings the light and love of God right to us. Jesus comes to God's chosen people, but guess what?

They don't recognize him. They prefer the darkness they're living in to the light. Today, Jesus comes to all of us, but guess what?

Many still don't recognize him. They prefer the darkness to the light. Jesus travels to where we are, and for anyone, yes, anyone who accepts him, we are called to belong to God's family.

[15 : 28] Anyone can belong from all over the world, from any dark corner, and from any forgotten place. For those who believe in his name, he comes to be at home with us.

Surely, this is our message. Jesus comes home to us. He invites you, and me, and everyone, to travel together with him on life's journey.

To travel together with him through darkness and light, through joy and sadness, through hope and frustration. We're inviting everyone to travel together, so that we come home.

We come home to the persons we're meant to be. We're inviting people to belong to God's community.

There are no exceptions. We all belong. We're all invited to discover Jesus more each day on our journey. This is what we call the body of Christ, the church.

[16 : 35] The church is whoever shows up to walk this journey together. There'll be surprises as we see that tall buildings actually do exist.

We will learn to look from God's perspective and rediscover that where we are living is really the home we never knew. There'll be mistakes as we think electricity pylons are the Eiffel Tower.

But nothing, nothing stops the journey with him if we accept that Jesus comes to us. God's words, God's Emmanuel.

Many people think they don't belong, that they don't need to follow Jesus, that the journey is not for them. Religion is not for me, you hear?

Some people think that they don't fit in. Western countries like ours have adopted capitalism and capital philosophy wholesale.

[17 : 40] We often ask our children what they'd like to be when they grow up, usually meaning some kind of prosperous career. That's what we're hoping for. We see materialistic gain and financial prosperity as the key to happiness.

We always need to be succeeding. If the reply came, I want to be a follower of Jesus, we'll probably think, that's nice, and encourage them to be more realistic.

We reduce being a follower of Jesus to nothing more than pie in the sky when we die. Get your ticket to heaven and things will be fine from now on.

Interestingly, there's rarely much talk to discover who we are as a person. There's no journeying alongside others to discover grenadine, milk jam, and Dijon mustard.

Perhaps for many people, the journey never begins, or if it does, it stalls, and is contained in a box called simplicity, as Ian explained last week.

[18 : 57] Capitalism teaches us to be individuals, to be self-sufficient, to look after ourselves. We then take this thinking on into our faith. It's up to every individual, we think, to sort themselves out.

It's the philosophy. But Jesus comes in the flesh, not just to Mary and Joseph, but to shepherds, to travelers from distant lands.

And throughout his life, Jesus comes to everyone. The marginalized, the outcasts, the authorities, the children, the women, to everyone.

Everyone belongs, and all are created to follow him. What's interesting here is that Jesus needs us. He comes as God made flesh, yes, but he's a dependent baby, and then a dependent toddler, and a young boy for years.

[19 : 58] And as he teaches and meets with others, he's dependent on others to feed and clothe him and his followers, and to provide shelter. We're all interdependent.

In our journey home, we need each other. How often is it that our message, how often do we say that? Too often, we're too busy spiritualizing Jesus and describing spiritual blessings rather than seeing the person who is God's word in the flesh with all the inherent needs and that living in the flesh requires.

Much of the thinking we may have acquired we perhaps need to leave behind. It's often made out that we need to come looking for Jesus when all the time he comes home looking for you exactly where you are.

He's coming home to you, coming home to your neighbor, coming home to your friend, coming home to the stranger. We fool ourselves if we think anything else is important other than his coming home to embrace you with his love.

A priest was once in a retreat with a group of nuns. They would all sit around and study the Bible late at night, then go to bed and think about it, get up in the morning, and come back together and reflect on what they'd thought about the Bible verses they had read.

[21 : 38] Catherine, one of the nuns, said she'd had the most incredible dream the previous night. The way she said it, everyone said, ooh. Then she asked, would you like to hear it?

Yes, they said. So Catherine told her story. I dreamt I was in a huge dance hall along with many beautiful women and gorgeous men.

Suddenly, the band began to play and the men began selecting women to dance with. All were paired off except me.

I stood there by myself with all these couples dancing when the most gorgeous, intense, tall, and handsome man I'd ever seen walked into the hall. He looked around.

and even the dancers began to notice him. Suddenly, he looked straight at me with the most intense and beautiful eyes I'd ever seen.

[22 : 37] He walked straight over to me and asked me to dance. I said, yes, even though I couldn't dance. And he took me in his arms and walked onto the dance floor.

It was beautiful. I knew exactly what to do and we danced all over the floor. We were so good and everyone else stopped to watch us. And as we danced, I noticed his hands had nail prints on them.

And we continued to dance and then he suddenly stopped and leaned over to my ear and whispered, Catherine, I'm crazy about you.

That's the gospel we're calling people to. I'm crazy about you. calling us, everyone, to Jesus.

Jesus comes to us and takes us in his arms. He whispers in our ear, I'm crazy about you. I thought I'd finish by teaching you a bit of French.

[23 : 46] And so you'd be ready for whatever journey you might take. Okay? So are you ready for a bit of French? Are you ready? So are you going to repeat after me? Oh, oh, oh, oh.

Let's try it again. That wasn't very good. Oh, oh, oh, oh. That's it. You'll be ready now. This little musical clip I want to show you, it's in French but it's got some subtitles.

One little glitch says, I have no has come in and it should say I don't know. But the worst little glitch is where it says, I want to stop families. It shouldn't be translated as stop families.

it should be translated as stop famines. So if you pay attention, you'll see that bit. But anyway, and then obviously you've got your part in it.

Si je parlais les langues des hommes et même celles des anges sans amour je ne serais qu'une cymbale qui résonne si j'avais le pouvoir de saisir tous les mystères, si je pouvais même déplacer des montagnes.

[25 : 10] Si je n'ai pas l'amour, je ne suis rien. Si je n'aime pas mon prochain, ça ne sert à rien. je ne sais pas de quoi sera fait demain mais moi je choisis des nues c'est ça ma liberté.

Yeah. Si je distribuais mes biens aux gens dans le besoin If I was ready to turn my life to save someone If I could stop the famine and the guerrilla If I could get out of the misery If I don't love, I'm nothing If I don't love my future, it's not worth I don't know what will be tomorrow But I chose to aim, it's not my freedom Yeah Oh oh oh oh

Maintenant, ces trois choses demeurent La foi, l'espérance et l'amour Mais la plus grande de ces choses, c'est l'amour Si je n'ai pas l'amour, je ne suis rien Si je n'aime pas mon prochain, ça ne sert à rien Je ne sais pas de quoi ça va faire demain Mais moi je choisis d'aimer, c'est ça ma liberté Yeah Oh oh oh Thank you.