



THE ARCHBISHOP
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On 22 October 2023 the BBC R4 Sunday Service was led by Paul Butler, the Bishop of Durham, from St Peter's Chapel, Bishop Auckland.

He introduces the UK's new Faith Museum at Auckland Castle in the historic home of the Prince Bishops of Durham, bringing tourism and spiritual renewal to the area.

In the sermon he gave Bishop Paul mentions the recently created [Northern Saints Trails](#), routes of pilgrimage to Durham Cathedral in the North East. The sermon follows in full.

Approaching the Faith Museum entrance feels like an invitation to an unknown journey. You slope down into what is a semi subterranean space. The doors are closed, yet inviting you in. The lighting is subdued. As the doors slide back ahead lies a long corridor calling you in to explore and discover. The whole experience is a journey into faith. There is the history that unfolds through the dazzling array of wonderful objects from 4000BC through to our own day. But all along as these are pondered the questions that are posed at the very beginning; 'Am I alone?' 'How do I live?' and 'Where do I belong?', are being explored and all visitors invited to ponder their own response.

This journey has some unexpected twists and turns but it is far less demanding than God's call to Abram. 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you'. How Abram heard this call we are not told, but we do know that he responded saying 'Yes' to God's call. So began a long journey of trusting God. It was a physically long and demanding journey where Abram and his family never settled into a permanent home. It was a lifelong journey of trusting God meant what God said and could be relied upon. Abram certainly never got the business of following God right. He made mistakes along the way. Some were costly to his family and household. But follow God's call he did. He knew he was not alone; God was with him. He journeyed in faith with others. He knew that above all else he belonged to God.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews gives us a clear definition of this faith which we heard read so movingly in the original William Tyndale version; in a more modern translation it is 'being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.' It rests not on our own human effort but on trusting God the Creator and Redeemer to be entirely trustworthy. It means taking risks with God. It involves letting go of our own security and safety and relying on God to uphold us, and bring us home.

The new Faith Museum stands on the route of the English Camino pilgrimage. Over the past few years here in the North East four new pilgrimage routes to Durham Cathedral have been developed; The Way of Life, The Way of Light, The Way of Learning and The Way of Love. Together they are the Northern Saints Trails. They are journeys to be enjoyed but also journeys of exploration and discovery.

Israel / Palestine, the land of the Holy One, is a land of pilgrimage for Christians, Jews and Muslims. Right now such pilgrimage is impossible

because of the horrific and tragic events that have unfolded over these past days. Pilgrims do not hold easy answers but they hold on to God, and trust God will hold on to us. Pilgrimage is an invitation to walk in the steps of Abraham as people of faith. We are invited to walk with the living Jesus who still calls us saying, 'Follow me'.

Jesus invited people to follow him personally, but also to do so together. He called the brothers Peter and Andrew, James and John, together. Matthew he called alone. Yet they then followed Jesus together.

The journey of faith is always deeply personal. Each one of us responds to God's call. But this call is never meant to be alone. Followers of Jesus travel together as the household, the family of God.

Right towards the close of the tremendous Faith Museum there is a sculptural piece in glass by Rachael Woodman called Gathering: Joyful Assembly. Her own description of this is that, 'Joyful Gathering is about worship. Each glass element is unique... it expresses my sense of wonder and joy as a human being born to worship the divine. It is a response to the questions posed at the beginning of the journey. What Rachael says in response to 'Am I alone.' Is, 'When I began my faith journey 35 years ago, the sense of being known and loved was overwhelming. It was as if I had come home. ...The joy of that first homecoming has matured into an assurance that I'm not alone and a longing to know more of the one who knows me.'

Faith is an invitation from the God who made us, knows us and loves us; it is a lifetime journey of exploration. It is always full of times of joy, and deep sadness. It has questions, some answered, some not. It is one in which we are all called to join, both personally and together. Since God invites us to it in Jesus, and because of the Cross and resurrection it is one where we can hold on to God's faithfulness.

As the writer to the Hebrews declares, 'Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, ... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith ...'

Living God thank you that you call us to walk with Jesus as the people you have made us to be, and as pilgrims together. Help us to live lives filled with faith, trusting you who hold our lives and eternity in your hands. Amen.

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