

On the road with the God-man

Ian Adams continues his reflections on a monastic spirituality for secular living

IT IS interesting how often in the Gospels the better-world-now for which we all yearn (the one that Jesus spoke of as "the Kingdom of God come near") often takes shape in the uncontrollable environment that is the open space, the street, or the market place. The road is full of surprise, and a place, if we are open to it, of learning.

The friar understands that the open space requires us to surrender our control. We are vulnerable on the road. "Have a safe journey," we say. "Call us when you get there," urge worried parents. Travel can be an anxious business. Home is so much safer.

But there is something vital about this human experience of stepping out into the unknown. The encounters that come our way will bring valuable learning. We will learn more about life, about love, about fear, and about people.

The experience of friar-disciples is that on the road we may also learn something about the companionship of the God-man Jesus, our fellow traveller; something about the guiding of the God-Spirit, full of surprise; and something about the constancy of the God-Parent, drawing us on.

One of the well-documented themes of an emerging Christianity in the past few years has been the consistent attempt to be in so-called "secular space". Of course, in this experimentation the rediscovery is made again and again that there is no such thing as secular space. Every place is holy; every place can be encounter space with the divine.

When groups or communities take the journey into the secular

space of park, café, or pub, they become much more accessible.

So how might we take something of this friar aspect of the religious life into our everyday life? I recommend walking. If you can, wherever you live and work, start to walk. And be open to the possibility of encounter. This will sometimes feel like a gift, at other times it will be demanding. On the road we meet whatever and whoever comes our way.

In Jesus's instructions to his soon-to-be-travelling disciples, he encouraged them to bring a sign of peace with them. Each house where they stayed (and, we might imagine, each person they met) was to be offered a blessing of peace (Matthew 10.12-13).

You'll have to work out what your greeting might be — I suggest that it needs to fit who you are and your setting. It may also reflect in some way, in word or spirit, the house greeting of Jesus; so something like "Peace to this house," or the greeting of the risen Jesus according to the Gospels of Luke and John, "Peace be with you" (Luke 24.36 and John 20.19, 21, 26).

What truly matters is the authenticity of the greeting, whatever the words or signs you use.

Receive Christ's peace, carry it with you, and share it.

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