

Location, location, location – in our lives today so much of our happiness seems to depend on where we live – have we got the best house in the worst street or the worst house in the best street? Is our neighbourhood one where our property values will increase? Have we chosen the right postcode for the school zones we want? Do we live near family and friends...or suitably far away from them? Does the community have the vibe that suits our values and our personalities? Do we have a sea view, or a house near a park? Are we near a hospital, a bus stop, a good local café? All these questions govern our decisions about where to place ourselves.

We also make a bunch of choices about how and where we move around within our days and weeks – where do we spend our work time, our leisure time? Where do we volunteer, who do we visit, what people do we associate with and come alongside?

Do we structure our days with a schedule, with meetings, appointments and visits all slotted in, or do we just go places and hang out, with no particular plan?

I'm intrigued by Matthew's account of why Jesus chose to make his home in Capernaum. He tells us that Jesus went there "so that what had been spoken of through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled" and then quotes a prophecy about how those in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, on the road by the sea...in Galilee of the gentiles, have seen a great light coming into their darkness. It's possible that Jesus didn't have this specific piece of scripture in mind when he decided to get away from Nazareth, and that Matthew just wrote it in later, but it's also entirely plausible that Jesus, as a scholar and teacher of his religion, deliberately located himself in Galilee to fulfil prophecy and point people towards the truth of his identity.

What interests me about that decision is that it shows *how much we say without saying anything...* how physical signs and actions have great meaning beyond what we do with our words. The ancient prophets of the Hebrew Bible had plenty to say, but they also often acted out their prophecy with bodily signs, such as Jeremiah smashing jars in front of a crowd, Ezekiel baking bread over human waste, and Isaiah walking around naked for three years.

Jesus, fully aware of this history of prophetic action, begins his ministry by coming to be baptised in the Jordan, and then chooses where to base himself so that people would more clearly see him as the fulfilment of Israel's hopes.

And then he walks by the sea, going looking for those who would join him in taking the first steps in Christian discipleship and community.

When he finds them, he invites them to 'follow' him – he calls them to leave their security and their former ways and physically relocate, to travel around with Jesus, taking the message of good news and healing from place to place.

We know that Jesus taught with authority and that people were grasped by his message and his new insights into their sacred texts. But far beyond that, it's what Jesus did and where he went that took hold of people's hearts and imaginations. He touched lepers. He healed the sick. He went fearlessly out onto the sea, a place of great terror for all but fishermen, and calmed the storm there. He fed people. He called a group of friends to gather around him and learn from him. He changed water into wine. He washed his disciples' feet, he shared bread and wine as a ritual act, he wept in the garden, and he submitted to death on the cross without committing any act of violence against those who hated and humiliated him.

In every action, Jesus chose to preach a gospel of love without words. His signs weren't just meant to prove himself, like some magician demonstrating his credentials. His signs were *in and of themselves* an enactment of the good news of God's forgiveness and the coming of a new kingdom...a new economy...a new way of being human in communities of honesty and grace. Jesus' actions were designed to spark intrigue, hope, delight and possibility in those who encountered them.

By contrast, we live in a very wordy age. We vote for our politicians based on what they tell us they'll do, and their many speeches on the campaign trail. We read screeds of text in newspapers or online, absorbing endless ideas and letting our minds be shaped by rhetorical flourishes and clever vocabulary. Social media influencers are, on the whole, just heads on a screen, talking, talking, talking, oh my goodness how they talk.

Much as we're heavily impacted by images and music, the word seems to be our dominant meaning-making device.

But is it? We are a language animal. But we are also flesh and blood people whose full humanity is perhaps more shaped than we realise by bodily actions and movement, especially when those actions are symbolic in some way, or meet our needs for connection and belonging. We are a ritual animal, and a tactile, sensing animal, who receive unspoken messages on a deep, often unconscious, level.

As a community of faith, as people who like Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John have been called to 'follow' Jesus – to walk in his footsteps and shape our lives in accordance with his ways – we need to take seriously everything we are saying with our bodies in space, here in our worship and during the week. Where do we choose to locate ourselves? Whose company do we keep?

Who do we touch, make eye contact with, embrace? Who do we feed and sit at table with?

When we come here on a Sunday, we do things with our bodies that can't be put easily into words. Empowered by God's Holy Spirit we sit down next to people we may never have known but for our shared faith. We share a sign of peace, expressing our unity with these otherwise strangers and reaching out across our differences. We come to a table where all are welcome, none is excluded, and where we put out our empty, open hands to receive food that we can't buy and that we haven't earned – physical food that contains spiritual nourishment for our whole being.

Christian living is not about changing what we do with our heads – our beliefs and our language – it's about training our bodies to go to the places Jesus went, to come alongside people Jesus loves.

Our ritual actions in this building aren't just about a mystical encounter – though they may give rise to those from time to time. They're about practising for life. What we do symbolically here we do for real, when we can, in our daily lives. We seek the true food that can't be bought and sold, that which is eaten with others in a spirit of hospitality. We greet the stranger with a sign of peace until they become our neighbour. We forgive and receive forgiveness, and we look for ways to invite others into our abundance with a generous heart.