

Phil's Picture Posts

Week 2: Ascent



Whitby, 2008

Many of you will have visited and climbed the 199 steps at Whitby leading from the harbour side up to the abbey. It is a long haul to the top! The photo here looks down the steps, but the woman in the picture determinedly goes up with bags in hand. The *psalms of ascent* (Psalms 120-134) are associated with journeys to religious festivals as pilgrims made their way up to Jerusalem and to the Temple at the heart of Jewish life and worship (look at Psalm 122 if you have time). Whilst the experience of pilgrimage brings its own rewards, there is also a reminder that the journey made by the pilgrim can often be a difficult and arduous one, with many challenges along the way.

Copenhagen, 2014

The Round Tower was originally built as an observatory in the seventeenth century at a time when growing scientific understanding, with its disciplines of experiment and observation, was challenging many of the religious conventions of the time. The tower does not have steps; instead, there is a continuous spiral slope which made it easier to take heavy astronomical equipment (pulled by horses) up to the top. I love the simplicity shown in the scene with the white walls, smooth path and light coming through the window. Scientific insight can help cut through religious paraphernalia, but equally I would want to challenge notions of 'progress' in our modern world as being a straightforward process of onward and upward achievement.



Hong Kong, 2017

Tourists climb the steps to visit the statue of the Buddha on Lantau Island. Religious experience is often associated with expressions of ascent, with the believer being taken up into an experience of the spiritual or heavenly realm. Following Christ's ascension into heaven, the disciples were lifted up in worship, joy and thanksgiving (Luke 24).





Saltburn, 2008

A little further around the coast from Whitby is the seaside town of Saltburn-by-the-Sea. The cliff lift is a Victorian construction which works on a 'water-balance' system. The car at the bottom moves up the hill as it is balanced by water being added into the car at the top. As the balance is tipped the cars begin to move. The upward journey only happens because there is also a going down. It is a reminder to me that in the spiritual life, we cannot spend all our time on a spiritual high, but we need to return to the 'lower level' of ordinary life and routine. We cannot remain on the mountain top but need to live out our Christian discipleship 'on the plain' in service of others.

To think about:

Bring to mind a climb that you made. What do you remember the most about it? Was it during the course of the climb itself, or what you found at the top?