

St Luke

'It's the travelling that's interesting,... not the sitting-still.'

So remarks the eponymous Aunt Augusta of Graham Greene's *Travels with my Aunt* to her querulous nephew Henry. He is complaining that they've just been deported from Istanbul before he's seen a single minaret. Just then she points one out from the train window and he misses it in trying to hear what she's saying. This is how the scene goes in the *film*, with Maggie Smith as an outrageously camp old aunt.

I had trouble locating the same exchange in the novel. I might have said, 'it's a film; she should have said that even if Graham Greene didn't get around to recording the words.' Greene often indicated in interviews that his characters had their own life and voice and led *him* through the logic of their stories. Obviously she *should* have said it! But after extensive research I discovered that the exchange *is* in the novel, in an earlier scene, before Henry and his aunt have even set off for Istanbul:

I picked my aunt up in the bar of the Crown and Anchor where she was having a stirrup-cup and we drove by taxi to the Kensington terminal. I noticed that she had brought two suitcases, one very large, although, when I had asked her how long we were to stay in Istanbul, she had replied 'Twenty-four hours.

'I seems a short stay after such a long journey.'

'The point is the journey,' my aunt had replied. 'I enjoy the travelling not the sitting still.'

Not quite the same. Both versions are truly Aunt Augusta's words but the medium and context alters them. The train and the visual prop of the missed minaret provides a different context for the film version.

Gospel writing, and reading, works like this. Luke sometimes records things which no one else has written down (as do the other evangelists). That is not ammunition for atheists. It is an inevitable and providential consequence of Luke writing later than at least two other gospel writers, and writing from the perspective of a gentile Greek and a disciple and colleague of the Apostles, especially Paul (and like Paul he wasn't present as the gospel events occurred). We are uniquely indebted to Luke for giving us volume two, the Acts of the Apostles. Luke is a historian of the nascent church, not just a biographer of the founder (he tells us he's writing like a contemporary historian).

My quotation from Aunt Augusta might describe his life in the faith: one thinks of him puffing in an effort to keep up with St Paul's restless energy:

'The point is the journey,.. I enjoy the travelling not the sitting still.'

That's also true of the process of gospel composition and Luke's initiative in adding the Acts of the Apostles.

Not content merely to copy out someone else's work, Luke, perhaps spurred on by Paul, carefully sought out other witnesses and delved further into scripture: the Old Testament was new to him, a gentile convert. He searched the Old Testament better to understand the mystery and meaning of Jesus' birth and the particular role of Mary in bringing our salvation to pass. From him we have a greater emphasis on Mary

(tradition says that he painted the first icon of her, in Ephesus) and also on the role of women as disciples and leaders in faith.

His emphasis on Mary and the other women in the story is paired with emphasis on justice (which he finds in the prophets, reading them with fresher gentile eyes than the Jewish Matthew). So, from Luke, we have the purer form of Jesus' beatitudes: Matthew reports him as saying

'blessed are the poor *in spirit* for *theirs* is the kingdom of *heaven*'

Luke gives us the more direct, personal and concrete,

'blessed are *you poor*, for *yours* is the kingdom of *God*'.

Here is a direct line to the outspoken prophecy of the great Old Testament voices, rather than the less outward-looking theology of Matthew, who always has one eye on that synagogue over the road which he used to attend and where he has a personal argument with the Rabbi.

'The point is the journey... I enjoy the travelling not the sitting still.'

It seems from 2 Timothy that Luke was among the few who *could* keep up with Paul ('only Luke is with me'). From Acts we heard a taster of extensive journeying: through Phrygia and Galatia, passing by Mysia and going to Troas; then Paul has one of his visions and off they go to Samothrace, then Neapolis, and so to Philippi in Macedonia. In our second reading there is also the suggestion that Mark and Luke must have known each other (or at least that they're about to meet)

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.

In the gospel we heard the Lord sending out the first missionaries to prepare the way for his own peripatetic preaching of the kingdom. More travelling [and also lockdown advice!]. There was certainly no option of sitting still once you got to know Jesus. But there was also no sitting-still in recording and interpreting events for us. As the film and book of *Travels with my Aunt* are at once different and yet simultaneously true to the characters they portray, so Luke's gospel is a true version of Jesus, every bit as true as Mark, Matthew or the much more interpretative John.

Within that truth, in Luke's case, lies an unmissable insistence on the pursuit of *justice* here and now, as well as hope for the future in glory. That is part of the response which Jesus demands. A very different character in a very different Greene novel says,

Sooner or later...one has to take sides. If one is to remain human.

That's about the Vietnam war, in Greene's novel *The Quiet American*. A Vietnamese colleague speaks to the English journalist Fowler, a man who has always tried to avoid involvement in the horrors unfolding around him in Vietnam. It was Greene's faith speaking when he wrote that and it could also be a text for St Luke, who finds our humanity redeemed by Christ. He shows how active involvement with others and *for* others is a sign of our faith in that redemption. Travelling and humanity go together. Because Jesus took on the fullness of our humanity, all true roads now lead us to God.