

16th September 2024

Travels

**“Travelling – it leaves you speechless,
then turns you into a storyteller.”**

Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*

Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta was a 14th century Moroccan scholar, traveller and explorer. His writings give us extensive accounts of his excursions over almost thirty years, covering some 73,000 miles, traversing almost the entirety of the Islamic world and beyond, taking him to North and West Africa, Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, Central and Southeast Asia, and China. As a traveller, he outdid most, if not all, ancient and contemporary explorers.

Clearly Ibn Battuta's travels didn't leave him speechless for long. His wonderful storytelling not only gives us information on the colourful and fascinating worlds of many 14th century civilisations, but also offers us insights into the thinking, beliefs and interests of the traveller himself. I've been travelling recently too, including to several places which were new to me. Sometimes I've been speechless, *and* I have stories to tell.

But aren't we all travellers, physically, of course, but metaphysically too, life travellers over thousands of miles? *We* may have been rendered speechless on our journeys. Maybe we are speechless now, still unable to articulate how we feel. But nonetheless, we have our stories, and we are storytellers, perhaps not as prolific as Ibn Battuta, but we still have our stories. And we need people who will listen. I know I do ...

Might we also be willing to listen to the stories of others: insights from the past; unresolved issues; life-changing events; explorations of faith, perhaps? In my early ministry, I visited an elderly lady who shared a story from her childhood of knitting socks, which she and her granny took to Edinburgh's Waverley Station to give to the soldiers returning from the Boer War. *The Boer War*, for goodness' sake! Here was living history, recounted by a prolific storyteller to a willing, and fascinated, listener.

Let's recognise that our stories matter, and that we have much to gain from listening to a storyteller. Let's remember that storytellers need listeners, who're prepared to wait with patience till stories, in whole or in part, have been recounted – just like those of Ibn Battuta.

A prayer for today

In my faith journey, I can be speechless. But I still have my own story waiting to be told.

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