

‘Get on board, little children.’

Recently one of our Sisters had to go on a train journey. “No big deal”, others might say, but to her it was a very big deal indeed. She had not been on a train for years. We often go places together but this time she was on her own. Never had the pull of home at West Kirby seemed so strong. However having safely negotiated a ticket barrier, found the right platform, the correct coach on the train and finally her seat, she sank down in relief. Not being the best of travellers in any form of transport she discovered by the time the train reached Leeds that she was still in one piece, beginning to think clearly and relaxing.

Her mind began to wander onto other train journeys when much younger, the excitement when traveling to the Wesley Deaconess College and even more so, when a train took her to foreign parts indeed, Wiltshire, to begin work on caravan evangelism. Unfortunately she loved Wiltshire and its people too much and wept all the way, on a train to Birmingham, after saying good-bye and moving on to pastures new in Lincolnshire. Later in life, there was a journey from London to Liverpool but unfortunately when the ticket collector came around he informed her that the train was going to Sheffield! Crewe station late at night is an eye-opener and Lime Street, sometime later, was even worse.

Having visited memory lane, as the train rumbled on, she began to think of the journey through life. Many of her remembrances of train journeys fairly accurately illustrated stages on the journey, the confidence of youth, the responsibilities of middle age when the wrong train can be boarded and finally, the lack of confidence in new situations as one grows older. Quite unbidden an old African-American spiritual came to mind,

‘The gospel train is coming
I hear it just at hand
I hear the car wheels moving
And rumbling through the land.

Get on board little children
Get on board little children
Get on board little children
For there is room for many a more.’

That is one train that we don’t want to miss. Originally the Gospel Train was a code word used for the Underground Railroad used by slaves. It was often sung just before an escape. The Gospel Train is the road to freedom for us too. St Paul writes that we are slaves to sin, that is gossip, wanting our own way, selfishness, pride, self-pity – the list is endless. Only those who have tried to free themselves discover that it is impossible. Along comes the Gospel Train and the invitation to get on board and we are traveling into freedom. There are two journeys in life, one is the outward journey through the passage of years and the other, far more important, is the inner journey with God. For the Christian the two are intertwined.

Over the years, verses were added, or altered. ‘There is no second class’ is one of the additions. On two occasions when booking online, we have found ourselves travelling in a

first class carriage due to lack of seats elsewhere. Unaccustomed luxury! This was courtesy of the rail company, as we had only paid for second class seats. In the Gospel train, it is all first class! We see in the church rich and poor, intellectuals and ordinary folk like most of us. We are all God's children and therefore brothers and sisters in his family journeying together.

'The fare is paid', we are reminded in another version. Jesus paid the fare for us to get on board! It is free. When we are weary with struggling on our own, if we stop and listen we will hear the approach of the Gospel Train.

'I hear the bell and whistle
The coming round the curve.
She's playing all her steam and power
And straining every nerve.'

So, 'Get on board, little children, there is room for many a more'.

