

## Thought for the day: 25 – 31 May 2020

Rev. Wendy Sellers

This week's thoughts have been written by our Wendy from the Stroke ward at Lister hospital, where she spent a few days after suffering a mini-stroke.

### Monday 25 May

*And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. (Genesis 2. 2)*

As many of you know, I was recently forced to spend a few days in hospital. I actually hadn't been completely well for at least a month. I had failed to consider that I might possibly have had COVID-19 and, if so, it might take some time to shake off the after-effects. Or, that much of my energy was being taken up with simply existing in our lockdown world, with all the worries and anxieties that entails. Instead, I kept on as usual: trying to do things for everyone else, working through the never-ending jobs' list, taming the garden and feeling guilty when I stopped for too long. And, you know what, in hospital there is just no choice about whether or not you stop. In hospital there is nothing to do other than try to get better. God told us to rest one whole day a week. I, for one, need to listen. Do you?



*Jesus said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (Mark 6. 31)*

## **Tuesday 26 May**

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (Genesis 1. 1-3)*

Once upon a time... or, as God would say, "In the beginning ..."

When I was in hospital, suddenly I was living in community. There was me, four older ladies and a whole cast of NHS professionals in my ward bay. And, given the smallest opening, many people, myself included, liked to tell our stories. We are all storytellers, and we belong to a narrative faith - the story of God and his people, as told not just in the Bible but in history and in our lives. Parts might not seem that interesting (try reading the Book of Numbers) but storytelling is integral to God himself and, therefore, to those made in his image. We need to tell our stories to make sense of the world. Next time someone tells you some of their story, try to engage and show them you appreciate the honour. Because all of us need our stories acknowledged - they are woven into who we are and they reshape us as we tell them.

*But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21. 25)*



## Wednesday 27 May

*See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity... Choose life. (Deuteronomy 30. 15, 19)*

There was a lady opposite me in the stroke ward. She also had three types of cancer. It swiftly became obvious that she was not easy to please - probably her pain made her cantankerous. She needed to move into a nursing home, which the NHS would fund. It seems that for a week the relevant staff had been trying to guide her in that decision; a decision she didn't want to make, yet knew she had to. I witnessed a day of this negotiating as a patient young woman talked through her options, showed pictures of possible homes on her phone and put up with endless blocks and deflections.

Patience is a virtue and the nursing staff seemed to have bucketloads of the stuff. Patients were treated respectfully, not as infants, in spite of their physical dependence. At times this was quite obviously hard to maintain; the patience was 'manufactured' rather than natural. Thank goodness that counts just as much, because many of us lack 'natural' patience. Perhaps, patience is even more valuable when, somewhere inside, the 'patient' person is screaming "Ahhhhhhh". But the important thing was that, as far as possible, that lady was given the chance to make up her own mind. She eventually did, and I pray that they look after her well, as she lives out her end days.



*The end of something is better than the beginning. Patience is better than pride. (Ecclesiastes 7. 8)*

## **Thursday 28 May**

*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13. 13)*

The ward wasn't really a place of hope - most people were very poorly and some were even dying. All of us were there because of a stroke. They happen swiftly. One minute you are fine, the next your life has changed and not for the better. Hopes were, therefore, small ones - of getting the care in place to be allowed to go home, or simply of dinner being edible. I'm not sure about people's faith in that context, although staff and patients were very interested in having a 'vicar' on the ward. And love is perhaps too strong a word for such fleeting and largely practical connections, as are formed in such circumstances.

However, I would say that the greatest virtue in a hospital is cheerfulness, in both staff and patients. Hospitals are grim places, and the Lister was battling a virus which added an extra layer of grimness. It could easily become a place of despair, but that was not the feeling. In the ambulance, A&E, scanning, the corridors, on the ward: most people tried to be cheerful. So, I did, too. It was tempting at times to be negative, upset or frustrated. But we all got along a lot better with a veneer of cheerfulness, even if at times it was hard work to achieve.

*A cheerful heart is a good medicine,  
but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.  
(Proverbs 17. 22)*



## Friday 29 May

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.*

(Proverbs 3. 5)

Sometimes you have to trust someone else and sometimes you have to trust your own instincts. When I woke Dale up at 1.30am, I knew something was badly wrong, and when I told him to call NHS 111, he did. I had seen the TV adverts and I recognised the signs of a stroke. After that, we had to trust decisions to others - the call operator, the paramedics, the hospital staff. At each point I was sure they'd tell me that everything was ok and I could go home. But at each point that wasn't the advice, so I had to put myself in wiser, more experienced and more cautious hands. Sometimes we have to trust – each other or promptings from Above. Thank goodness I did.



*Put your hand in the hand  
of the man*

*Who stilled the water*

*Put your hand in the hand  
of the man*

*Who calmed the sea*

*Take a look at yourself*

*And you can look at others  
differently*

*Put your hand in the hand  
of the man*

*From Galilee (Anne Murray)*

## Saturday 30 May

*And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.*  
(Ecclesiastes 4. 12)

I was admitted to the ward at around 6 in the morning. It swiftly became a hive of activity, not just because of my new admission but because morning is a time of staff handovers, doctors' rounds, giving out medication and physiotherapy. There were social workers, cleaners and occupational therapists. Even without any visitors, it seemed noisy and packed. I hadn't seen many people for six weeks and no one up close, apart from Dale and Hatti. But social distancing doesn't happen in a busy hospital ward. It just can't. And it reminded me that we are naturally social. That we are not really stand-offish. That leaving space around ourselves is a temporary step we are sensibly taking, but once we know it is safe, we will be invading each other's personal space just as we did before. For me, that time can't come soon enough, but the ward reminded me that social distancing is not natural. God is a God of relationship and he made us that way, too. And we will return to our old ways with both friend and stranger, because we just won't be able to help ourselves.

*Greet one another with a kiss of love.*  
*Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*  
(1 Peter 5. 14)



## **Sunday 31 May**

*Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed. (Genesis 17. 17)*

In Genesis, God makes both Abraham and Sarah laugh when he tells them they will become parents at a very old age. Their child, once born, is called Isaac - which means laughter.

When I had my eyes operated on and the lenses replaced, I saw my face for the first time ever without thick glasses. And I discovered I had laughter lines - let's not call them wrinkles. I was glad - because those must represent my face as it normally is. Smiling not frowning.

We are all having to get used to wearing masks and seeing them on others. But this doesn't mean we can't still see each other's smiles. You smile with your eyes as much as your mouth. My laughter lines will still be visible. We need to keep smiling at each other. The smiles are still there behind the masks.



*The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. (Numbers 6. 25)*