

# Thought for the Day: 8 – 14 June 2020

## by Katie Seaton

### Monday - Motivation

Most of you know that I've moved into the Creative Arts, and am loving it. A couple of weeks ago, the showrunner on my favourite job told me that his other job - lecturing in creative writing and media - was likely to go as a result of the devastation that COVID has wrought on the universities. Knowing that the teaching is an important part of his life, my gut response was one of empathy and concern. He had recently been up for a prestigious university award and now - two months later - this!

Then I noticed that I had not thought, "Oh no, what if *my* favourite job goes as a result of this?!" And I felt rather pleased with myself for being selfless.

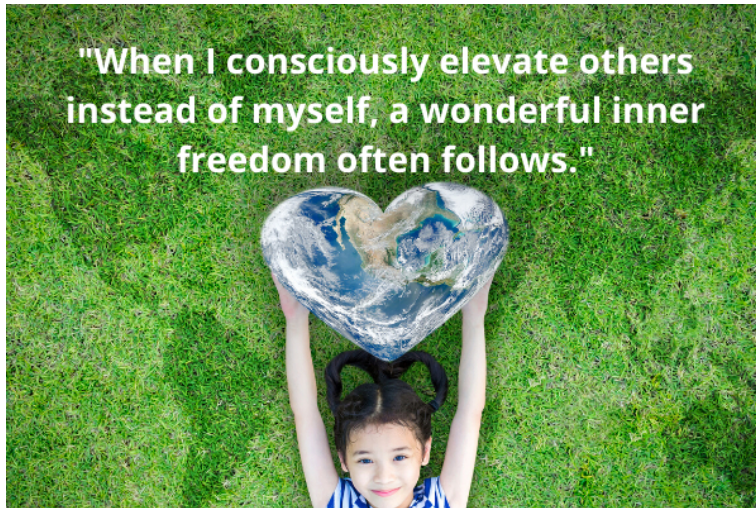
Then I noticed that I'd felt pleased with myself. And realised I could not be as nice as I think I am, if this was a subject for self-congratulation.

Then I thought, "At least I know it"! And felt reassured by that self-awareness.

Then I remembered *The Screwtape Letters*... (see tomorrow!)

The sacrifices we've all made- of our freedom, our agency, our physical connections to loved ones, our precious times of solitude (especially that last one, if you're like me!) - I sense that most people did make them willingly. We understood that it protected the vulnerable and helped those looking after us.

In the end, there will always be self in everything, but I have found – to my surprise! - that when I disregard caution and act with reckless generosity, or when I consciously elevate others instead of myself, a wonderful inner freedom often follows.



Obviously, the Bible remarked on the oh-so-human subject of being 'good' to gratify one's own self-image long before you, me or indeed C.S. Lewis. But I've noticed before that the language of the Epistles often seems to acknowledge that purity of motivation is

not a particularly human trait. On several occasions, members of the church are advised by Paul and Peter to "clothe ourselves" in the desirable attributes. So: wear it. Not be it. But maybe they are good clothes for a journey?

*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. (Colossians 3. 12)*

*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble." (1 Peter 5. 5)*

## Tuesday - By jove! I'm being humble!

Here's the paragraph of *The Screwtape Letters*, that yesterday's little conversation with myself brought to mind. The demon 'Screwtape' advises his inexperienced tempter demon nephew on how to handle an outbreak of humility in a human:

*'I see only one thing to do at the moment... Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, 'By jove! I'm being humble', and almost immediately pride – pride at his own humility – will appear. If he awakes to the danger and tries to smother this new form of pride, make him proud of his attempt – and so on, through as many stages as you please. But don't try this too long, for fear you awake his sense of humour and proportion, in which case he will merely laugh at you and go to bed.'*

Oh boy, I have rarely felt more 'heard' than in this passage!

It really helps me to remember to laugh (affectionately) at myself at the right moments. It makes life so much lighter and easier.



## Wednesday – Ease

When I was a young woman, I was taken by a choir to sing in a festival in Italy. I've always fought it, so people sometimes express surprise, but I'm a shy person, really. Interacting with all of those singers that I didn't really know felt too hard, so I went to watch the planes out of the window (I like planes!). A man from the choir came over to talk to me, trying to help me feel more part of things socially.

Four days later, we were already firm friends, and I noticed that he had become the one person I felt entirely at ease to be myself with. I was studying a little physics at the time, and particles had rather caught my imagination. I used to describe him as my 'ground state' – this is the state in which an electron in an atom can sit with no extra energy required to be there.

And eighteen years later to the day, as I write, I still feel this way about my husband, Peter. The past three months have been made far easier by it being him here with me.



Sometimes, when conditions are right, I feel that there is no strain, no struggle, needed in order for fruitful things to happen. It is not always that way, but isn't it a life-giving gift when these times and places – and people – of ease come

along? These things, as much as the strain and struggle, have always been part of the human story, and the Bible records them throughout the millennia.

*So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labour, for these are gifts from God. (Ecclesiastes 3. 12-13)*

## Thursday – Struggle

I have several remote friends in the Arts now. The digital era, for all its pitfalls, has melted distance and borders.

One writer that I met this way is a black American. I happen to be writing this the day after the murder of George Floyd. She tweeted to say how exhausted and despairing she was that, no matter how hard they try, black Americans keep getting murdered, marginalised, discriminated against. Suffocated.

I replied, "I'm so sorry." Then I saw that she had previously said, "Don't tell me you're sorry. Do something about it!" My empathy was real but - it's true - words of sympathy achieve little.

Of course, a fundamental of the Christian story is all about conspicuously holding up the mistreated people. Jesus led the charge on this: he acknowledged and supported despised ethnic minorities, women (powerless then), the disabled and mentally ill, all very much in public.

Parts of the church have, of course, always continued to follow the example. There have been some fearless and wonderful figures in church history fighting these battles. But I usually feel that, as a body, we could stick our necks out more. There are many out there who are exhausted and despairing from years of – apparently futilely, as their treatment by society regresses – shouting for themselves.

Finally, there are many ways – all valid, I think – to interpret the Parable of the Talents. (I'm fond of saying this, so feel free



to close the email and go put the kettle on if you've heard it before...!)

As well as the more usual readings about personal attributes, and resources, I also think that privilege is a 'talent'. If we are born in a safe country; if we are white; if we are straight; if we have no disabilities; if we are neurotypical; if we have any kind of socio-economic advantage; if we are male – then that is a 'talent', because our voice has more power and we are safer to use it. If we bury that voice out of fear, when we could have supported our fellow people, what will the master say when he returns?

Here's something that popped onto my screen shortly after my non-exchange with my collaborator... Algorithm, probably. But I learned some important stuff (that I hadn't gleaned from news reports at the time) by reading it.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/mar/19/lambs-to-the-slaughter-50-lives-ruined-by-the-windrush-scandal>



## Friday - Challenge

I saw something that an atheist American friend had written today, in observing the protests. He suggested that people's willingness to overlook police violence was connected to our conditioning by 'spirituality', 'religion' and 'Christianity' to accept and love powerful figures, even when the evidence points to them not being nice.

How do you respond to this? It ain't comfortable, right? My friend is correct: religion has assisted with the exercise of power over millions, and continues to do so in many places and ways.

Yet, equally...

I feel that 'spirituality' is part of my conviction that the life experience of every person matters. Consciousness is clearly an inherent, meaningful property of the universe and every one of us is part of that. This is what keeps me conversing with whatever it is that we call 'God,' no matter what.

'Religion' - collective spirituality - allows me to see that I'm not the only one who has dwelt on this 'holiness' of lives.

And 'Christianity', I guess, helped me find a way to express that by how I live, regardless of how much it has also been used to oppress and 'gaslight' ordinary people.

We know that, while Jesus sometimes got irritated with the powerless, he reserved his furious scorn for the undeserving powerful. Me too, Jesus. Me too. In direct argument with my friend, I often see some of the most 'Christian' lives as being



those that are unafraid to be - peacefully, but dramatically - *non-consenting*...

The people who see how lives of people in Yemen they've never met are destroyed by weapons sold to Saudi Arabia by the UK. So they sit in the road in front of Arms Fairs until they are arrested: I watched it in person.



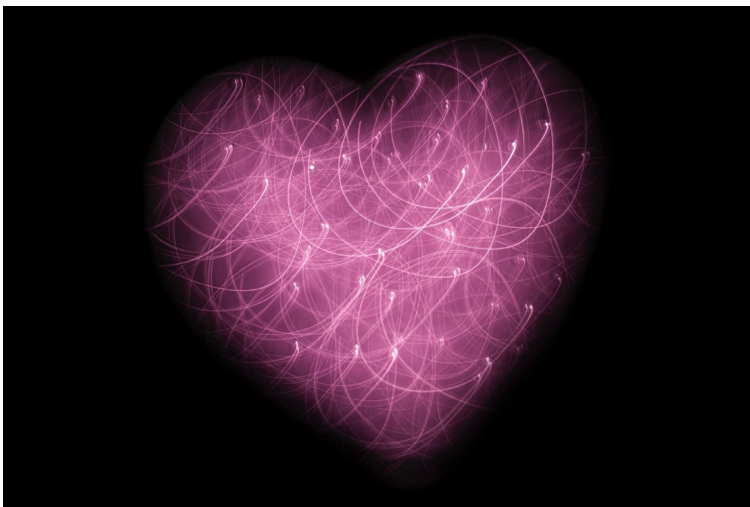
The people who observe that climate change will destroy us if we don't reverse our collective momentum, and act radically in response.

And now, the people who have suffered consistently at the hands of ugly, society-engrained racism, and who now insist on being heard.

## Saturday - Essence

Some of my work involves taking recordings of actors speaking lines and turning them into audio drama by adding all kinds of sounds (from simple footsteps and door closes to inter-dimensional aliens!) while writing the music to interweave with all of that.

I end up knowing the voices of the key actors extremely well. And it's not just sonic quality of the voices. Everyone has what has been called a 'grain' of the voice: a unique way of speaking that shows us a little of their essence, without us even hearing the words.



I record movements to match the characters, and I have to think hard about who they are to get it right. I write music that digs deep into my view of who their character is (as they perform them). They are a familiar part of my world,

and yet in the vast majority of cases I've never met the actor in the flesh.

Working with waveforms (computer representations of sound waves), it even gets to the point where I can see the shape of a waveform and know who's talking.

And so I get the fabulous privilege of 'meeting' someone without first encountering them socially. I can bypass the first

encounter, when you mostly meet their defences and learned social tricks, before, just maybe, if I'm lucky, glimpsing beyond that, with time – the usual way to get to know someone. And there is no chance of making a snap judgment based on physical appearance or superficial differences.

This brings to my mind those rather tender moments where we read that Jesus seemed to see someone and know them instantly. People like the Samaritan woman at the well, Levi the tax collector and the blind man healed. Sometimes, people play that 'If you had a super power, what would it be?' game. I reckon that a pure understanding of what a person is and how things feel and work in their heart and mind would be my choice.

## Sunday - We walk

When I tell people my son's name, I, born and bred in London and the south-east, tend to feel the need to explain that the reason it's a Welsh name is because he has a Welsh father. Often the response comes, "With a surname like Murphy?" And then I get to tell the story of how we think Peter ended up being a Welsh Murphy.

Murphy family legend goes like this: a few generations ago, some Murphys (Murphies?!) boarded a ship to emigrate to America. The ships tended to originate in Dublin, sail first to Cardiff to pick up further cargo and passengers, and from there head over to the US east coast. But (according to the legend) these recent ancestors decided - when they got off at Cardiff to stretch their legs - that, on reflection, that was probably far enough, and settled there instead!

So two (perhaps slightly defensive!) explanations are required about why we have names seemingly stolen from other peoples.

And yet why such importance? Moving around is what people have always done. The film that my friend Catherine is making explores how humans started off as continually migrating animals, around the coast of Africa. "We walked and walked..." the script begins. People have always walked, and will



continue to do so. I love the symbolism of the Adam and Eve story, as a way of saying we all came from one place... in the beginning...

I find it fascinating to wonder what peoples living on other landmasses were up to during the wanderings narrated in the Bible (and I have zero learning on this front and would be very happy to be corrected/educated by an anthropologist or geographer!). What were they doing in Australia while Abraham and Sarah kicked Hagar and Ishmael out? What were they up to in South America when the Jews were making their dramatic exodus from Egypt? Brothers and sisters - descendants, to use the biblical symbolism, of Eve and Adam - and yet they knew nothing of each other's existence. But I think that those people whose walking never brings them near us are still, as family members, as deeply relevant to us as they are to God.