

Thought for the day: 20-26 July 2020

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Monday

Apparently, two in five households have taken the opportunity of Lockdown to have a good old clear-out, causing charity shops across the country to brace themselves for an unprecedented deluge of donations. While I can see the benefits of decluttering and recycling, I'm a hoarder at heart and there are some things I just can't bear to part with. Among them are books I'll never re-read and certain toys once adored by our children, now outgrown and redundant. Memories too precious are stored within their faded pages and love-worn fur!

Maybe you've read Margery Williams' much loved children's classic 'The Velveteen Rabbit'. It's the unforgettable tale of the inseparable relationship between the Boy and his beloved toy Rabbit. It's a profound little story which centres around Rabbit's search for the answer to that question of questions, 'What is Real?'

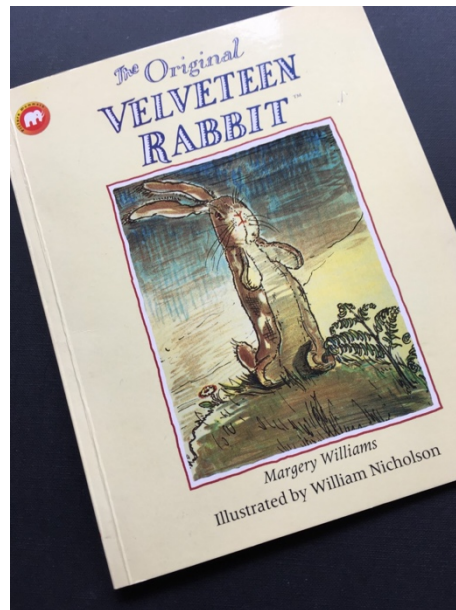
Rabbit seeks advice from Skin Horse, the oldest and wisest of the toys; 'Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?' Rabbit ponders (thinking of the arrogant clockwork toys who belittle him in the nursery). The wise old threadbare horse shakes his head and replies, 'When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real'.

Somewhere deep within us, I think we recognise the deep truth of that. It's Love that makes us Real. It's Love, in fact, that makes us. And it's Love we were made for.

Thank you for the Love that makes us Real; the Love that brings meaning to life; the Love that brings us to life. Amen

This week, if you can, try to read 'The Velveteen Rabbit'. You can read it for online at:

<https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/williams/rabbit/rabbit.html>



Tuesday

'Is God real?' That's a question many of us asked as children, and continue to ask, perhaps, as adults.

Often, we make the big mistake of thinking the answer is to be found in factual evidence or spiritual experience.

The closest scripture comes to giving us a definition of God is in those three profound words - 'God is Love' (1 John 4. 8). If that's so, then maybe another way of asking the God question is to ask ourselves, 'Is Love real?'. Most of us, I think, would want to say yes, but what proof do we have? Our feelings? Maybe, but feelings are subjective; they come and go.

In yesterday's Thought for the Day, we eavesdropped in on a conversation between two toys, Rabbit and Skin Horse, from the children's book 'The Velveteen Rabbit'. Wise old Skin Horse reveals that it was the Love of a child that over time had made him Real. He goes on to say that, 'Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby'!

There's a cost to Love. It requires that we give ourselves away, that we risk; that we make ourselves vulnerable. The proof of love is found only in living it out. If we want to know if God is Real, look for Love, because where Love is, God is. God can't be proved through argument or miracle; as St Augustine once said, 'We come to God by Love, not by navigation'.

In the Love I give and receive today, may I glimpse how Real You really are. Amen



Wednesday

This week we've been reflecting on that wonderful children's book 'The Velveteen Rabbit', where we discover from the wise old Skin Horse that Love is what makes a toy (like Rabbit) Real. Skin Horse goes on to say that, 'It doesn't happen all at once... you *become*. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept'.

We are not only human beings, we are human 'becomings'. We're never static, always we're becoming something... older (certainly)... wiser (maybe!). Life's experiences, especially the hard and difficult ones, will deepen us in one of two ways – either they make us more bitter or more empathetic; more selfish or more Loving. It's a choice, and usually the bitter or selfish option is the easiest. Always, however, they diminish us, they make us less Real. Choosing Love instead, however hard that is, will always, as Skin Horse says, make us more Real, more fully the human being we were born to become.

Today, may I choose to Love. Today, may I become more of the Loving presence I was created to be. Amen



Thursday

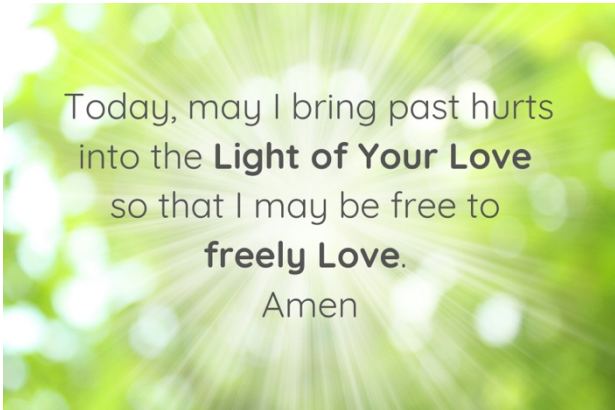
When the Skin Horse reveals to the Velveteen Rabbit that toys become real only through the Love of a child, Rabbit asks, 'Does it hurt?'. 'Sometimes', replies Skin Horse, 'but when you are Real, you don't mind being hurt'.

I'm not sure I share Skin Horse's confidence. Maybe what he means is that Love always finds a way through hurt.

That other great storyteller C S Lewis once said, 'Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable.'

'Love hurts', as the country song says, but it's worth it. If Love isn't given away, it dies.

Today, may I bring past hurts into the Light of Your Love so that I may be free to freely Love. Amen



Today, may I bring past hurts
into the **Light of Your Love**
so that I may be free to
freely Love.
Amen

Friday

We've been thinking about the Love that makes us Real. The Greatest Commandment requires that we Love God (however we understand that word), that we love our neighbour (frustratingly, that also includes our enemy), *and* that we love ourselves.

Sometimes it's that third one that's the hardest.

In the children's story 'The Velveteen Rabbit', we read that the Boy loved the toy Rabbit so much that 'he loved all his whiskers off, and the pink lining to his ears turned grey, and his brown spots faded. He even began to lose his shape and he scarcely looked like a rabbit anymore, except to the boy. To him he was always beautiful.'

One of the wisest spiritual writers, Richard Rohr, defines Faith simply as 'Accepting we are accepted'. So many of us spend too much of our precious lives feeling unacceptable. And maybe the religious voices in our past have rubbed that in, not out. Sometimes it takes a whole life to discover that, to God, we are 'always beautiful'.

Today, may I accept that I am accepted, exactly as and because of who I am. Amen



Saturday

There's something incredibly attractive about someone who is secure in Love; someone who is comfortable in their own skin. Little children are often the ones to teach us this; no pretension, no self-consciousness, no judgment.

In our story 'The Velveteen Rabbit', the toy Rabbit gets left outside and Nana has to hunt for it in the dark because the Boy refuses to sleep without it. Those of us who are parents will know this scenario well! Nana grumbles, 'All that fuss for a toy!', to which the Boy replies, 'You mustn't say that. He isn't a toy, He's REAL!'

The Boy could see what others couldn't. Love looks beyond appearance.

Today, may I look upon the world with the eyes of Love that I can see what You see. Amen



Sunday

Without giving away too many spoilers, we discover at the end of 'The Velveteen Rabbit' that Rabbit is taken away from the Boy when he contracts Scarlet Fever. In a heartbreaking moment, a Real tear falls from the Rabbit's little glass eye, leading to an unexpected miracle.

Tears are proof of Love, proof that we are Real. Often, they are the deepest prayers.

Most of us will know the pain of parting, perhaps also the pain of that final parting we call death. Death may end a life, but it can never end Love. Love, as 1 Corinthians 13 tells us, is the one constant, the one eternal thing. Everything else spoils and fades and disappears – only Love remains. Love connects all that is and all that was and all that shall be. Love enfolds us in every moment, especially in those moments we feel far from it, because 'There is nothing in heaven or earth; in the world as it is, or the world as it shall be; nothing in all creation that will ever separate us from the Love of God' (paraphrase of Romans 8. 38-39).



Today, may I feel secure in the embrace of Your never-ending, unending, forever Love. Amen