

Thought for the day: 27 July–2 August 2020

by Rev. Wendy Sellers

Monday - Ain't No Mountain High Enough

As we leave Shrewsbury, on our way to mid-Wales, we start to see the first hills in the distance and my heart lifts, for I know what lies ahead. To reach Tywyn, where mum and dad live, we have to drive through the Caledonian mountains and eventually over a high pass before we descend into the valley and drive on to the coast.

Mountains are often used in the Bible as places where people encounter God. And I can quite see why. But mountains can be unforgiving places. The climb can be strenuous; the view shrouded in mist. Anyone who has walked in Wales, or any other mountainous part of the UK, will have inevitably climbed a peak to find they can't see a thing from the top apart from the inside of a cloud!

Sometimes we are fortunate enough to have a 'mountaintop' experience of God. Sometimes, we somehow still fail to see things more clearly. If you climb a mountain often enough, eventually you will be rewarded and the view from the top should make all the failed attempts worthwhile. In the same way, it sometimes takes a bit (or a lot) of effort to know God better and encounter Him more fully. But the revelation, when we manage it, is spectacular.

*Ain't no mountain high enough,
Ain't no valley deep enough,
Ain't no river wide enough,
To keep me from getting to you.
(Ashford and Simpson, 1967)*



Tuesday: Wide as the Ocean

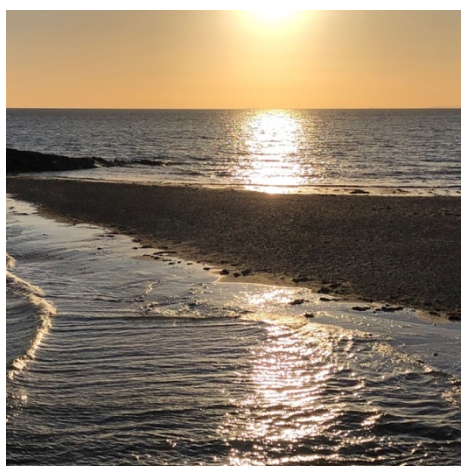
One of the many things I look forward to on my visits to Wales is being by the sea. I'm originally from a village on Portsmouth Harbour and we could see the sea from our lounge window. So, I've never grown accustomed to the fact that Hertfordshire is so far from the coast.

I love two things about the sea and they happen to be two things I also love about God. Both are unchanging, yet both manage also to be constantly on the move.

The sea has a smell and a sound all of its own. And the range of colours is just incredible. If you get in a boat at Tywyn you could (theoretically) travel right across the world to New Zealand or the Arctic, because all the sea is joined up. There is really only one vast ocean. It has moods: calm as a millpond or storm-angry. It is the original source of all life. It is not tame. When I am away from it, I yearn for it.

And God, like the sea, is utterly unique. There is nothing like our God. He can take us on a journey to unexpected far-off places. He can be soothing or challenging. He is the source of all life. He is never tame. And when I have felt apart from Him, my soul has yearned to return.

*Wide, wide as the ocean,
High as the heavens above.
Deep, deep as the deepest sea,
Is my Saviour's love.
(C. Austin Miles)*



Wednesday: Abba Father

The hills and mountains of Wales are covered with sheep and the fields in the valleys are full of them, too. There are many more sheep in Wales than there are people.

My eldest daughter's first words were uttered at about 10 months on her first trip to Wales. "A ba", she would shout from the carrier on her dad's back, pointing to a sheep. There were many, many sheep, and so we heard "A ba" many, many times, but we never tired of it (and we've never let her forget how adorable it was!).

Her words, years later, remind me of one of our words for God - Abba. I believe it means "daddy" in Hebrew. Does God ever tire of us calling to him? Never. Does God think we, his children, are adorable? You know, I really think he does.

*Abba Father, let me be
Yours and Yours alone.
May my will forever be,
Evermore your own.
(Dave Bilbrough, Thankyou Music)*



Thursday: And in the depth be praise

Tywyn lies at the sea end of a valley about 15 miles long and it is, to me, one of the most beautiful places on Earth. The valley floor is green and lush, and home to various brooks and rivers. The sides of the valley are steep and smooth and vegetation is sparse. This is because the valley was formed by the actions of a glacier. The ice, as it melted, forced its way towards the sea creating what is a text-book example of a glacial valley.

It happened in the last Ice Age and God was there. How mind boggling is that? And what is more incredible is that not only did God oversee something so large and momentous that it changed this landscape for ever, but he also still oversees and cares for each tiny detail. Each lamb, each primrose, each drop of rain (and there are plenty of those). No wonder He is beyond our comprehension, and small wonder that we worship Him.

*Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:
In all his works most wonderful,
Most sure in all his ways.
(John Henry Newman)*



Friday: All Creatures of our God and King

One of the things Cardigan Bay is known for is its bottle nose dolphins. The large semi-resident population often travels across the bay and so are sometimes visible from the shoreline. When this happens, word quickly goes out and people line the Prom at Tywyn, armed with binoculars, to take in the glorious sight.

I've been coming to Tywyn for over fifty years and have never seen the dolphins. It is a glory that has been denied me and, indeed, I fear I may never see them. For a while I thought this was due to some lack in me: that I wasn't looking hard enough or in the right place. Now I accept that I've just not been lucky. Similarly, I accept I have never spoken in tongues or heard anyone else do so, and this is not due to some lack in my faith, but because it happens not to have been right for me.

I have known many glories, but know that there are some I'll have to wait to see in the next life. Are there dolphins in Heaven? I have no idea, but I do hope so. Perhaps they will also speak in tongues. There's a thought!

*All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing
O praise Him, alleluia!*
(William Henry Draper, based on St Francis)



Saturday: I will offer up my life

Fifty years ago, my family came on holiday to Mid-Wales and we discovered the Talylyn Railway. This narrow-gauge slate railway was the first preserved railway in the world and is largely run by volunteers. We fell in love, and it is the reason my parents have spent their retirement years in Tywyn.

When I was thirteen, I decided I wanted to volunteer as a cleaner of the steam locomotives. There was significant opposition from my mum – to be fair, it is dirty, demanding work. But her opposition was nothing compared to that of many of the male volunteers (there were no female ones). They were convinced the engine sheds were no place for a young lady. Nothing deterred me. I seemed to have to work twice as hard as the male cleaners, but after a few years I qualified as a fireman.

I wish that self-belief had been with me when I first, tentatively, considered formal ministry. Perhaps I needed more opposition! But, instead, I made excuses and put it off, convinced I would be rejected by the church.

The next time someone suggests you could do something new in church, or in life, or maybe that you should explore a gift, then try to tap into a time when you, too, were fearless and full of self-belief. God believes in you. Others will, too. You might succeed or not, but whatever happens you will grow.

*I will offer up my life in spirit and truth,
Pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you.
In surrender I must give my every part,
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart.
(Matt Redman)*



Sunday: Keep me travelling along with You

Half way up the Talylyn Railway lies Dolgoch Falls, a popular tourist attraction. And who doesn't love a waterfall? All that noise, spray and power. You can climb the path beside the falls to the small valley above through which a brook babbles, the river Fathew. It is hard to believe this tranquil stream soon throws itself so exuberantly down the falls.

This hanging valley is pretty beyond description, especially on a sunny summer's day when dappled sunshine lights the scene. In my atheist days, I used to say I wanted my ashes scattered here.

The Fathew, of course, is both the tranquil brook and the waterfall. They are not different things. Life, too, can be tranquil or devastatingly turbulent. God, who at His core is Peace, can also surprise us: with His energy, His dynamism, His power, His ability to sweep all away before Him. We often forget that, and at what cost?

Sometimes, we might throw a stick in a stream to see where it will go. In the same way, God invites us to jump in and travel with Him, through the tranquil valley and over the waterfall. If we are brave enough to join in with what He is doing, what an adventure lies before us.

*And it's from the old I travel to the new,
Keep me travelling along with You.
(Sydney Bertram Carter)*

