

Thought for the day: 14-20 September 2020

by Claire Goodman

Monday



Rocks feature a lot in the Bible. The imagery conveys strength, steadiness, security, refuge. Almost two years ago, I had an image of clinging to a rock drenched and gasping for air while waves crashed over my head. Not just one wave,

but wave after wave after wave, with no obvious end in sight. The straightforward and not wrong interpretation is that in difficult times we cling to Jesus, our rock.

It is difficult, though, trying to hold on to a rock made slippery by multiple waves, that has hand holds, but not in easy places. A rock that is very solid, undeniably present but uncomfortable, uncommunicative, with no cheering words of "it'll be fine".

It can take effort to hold on to what will save you, to choose to trust in something bigger and stronger. It helps when others affirm your choice, shouting encouragement over the noise of wind and waves, praying for and helping you to hang on.

"My soul is downcast within me; therefore, I will remember you... Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life." (Psalm 42. 6-8)

Tuesday

I was given a t-shirt by a (still) very good friend that read, "Standby, next mood swings due in 6 minutes". I found it funny and true, but I stopped wearing it out when I saw strangers' puzzled looks.

To keep going with the rock imagery, rocks and stones are very constant, not given to unpredictable outbursts. That could be reassuring, but that is not what we are called to be. There are too many stories in the bible of what happens when God's followers' hearts are hardened and unresponsive.



Writer C.H. Spurgeon comments: *'...you might argue with a rock a long while before you would persuade it into flesh. ... The Spirit of God must change the nature, or the heart of stone will never become a heart of flesh.'*

Praying for a heart that God is making vulnerable, unabashed, delighted in God's love and ways (with maybe the occasional mood swing).

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36. 26)

Wednesday



The story of the woman caught in adultery never loses its power. The religious leaders were trying to trick Jesus into saying something incriminating, something that disagreed with the law of Moses. They already

knew he was never going to condone her stoning. Jesus took a long time to reply, but in the end said; "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" A reply that took all the attention off the woman and onto the crowd who, one by one, slipped away.

You would need to be sure of yourself to choose to aim a stone at someone, maybe assess its weight. Where would that confidence come from? Your upbringing, your parents, your reading and learning, the exhilaration of being with like-minded people?

Are there stones in our pockets, that we carry because we know we are right, that prevent us from responding as we should?

When everyone had left, and when there was presumably no one to hear him tell the woman the right thing to do, Jesus said he did not condemn her. He also told her to go and sin no more, leaving it up to her whether to take his advice or not.

Thursday



Rocks and stones in the wrong places can delay journeys and disrupt plans. It is a shock when we have to deal with situations we were not expecting or wanting.

Eugene Petersen, in his version of Romans 9. 33, provides a commentary that might resonate:

'They were so absorbed in their "God projects" that they didn't notice God right in front of them, like a huge rock in the middle of the road. And so they stumbled into him and went sprawling. Isaiah (again!) gives us the metaphor for pulling this together: Careful! I've put a huge stone on the road to Mount Zion, a stone you can't get around. But the stone is me! If you're looking for me, you'll find me on the way, not in the way.'

We need to be open to where God is working to be able to run to join Him, not fall over Him, an unforeseen obstruction.

[IMAGE: "Canyon Junction Rockfall" by ZionNPS licensed with CC BY 2.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>]

Friday



When a student in Edinburgh, I was used to seeing Arthur's seat as part of the city landscape. An extinct volcano, it was a presence and an easyish climb to the top. Depending on the weather, there was a

great view of the Castle, Holyrood Park, scattered church spires, university halls, Princes Street, the New Town, the sea and hills beyond.

It was a good place to go to think deep thoughts as only someone in their late teens, early twenties can; to have some distance from the everyday but still be connected. I always associate this particular rock with sitting and reading Peter's response when Jesus asked him if he wanted to leave.

'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.' (John 6. 68)

I come back often to this simple, foundational question. Where else would I go?

Saturday



Andrew and I visited Pulpit Rock in Norway. We took a boat from Stavanger, a bus and then walked 8km over hilly terrain to the rock that towers 604 meters above the Lysefjord. We were unprepared for the arrival.

There were no fences, no grip rails just a spectacular rock and view. I felt physically unwell when a young man, a baby strapped to his chest, sat down on the rock edge, legs dangling, savouring the moment. We were on the same solid rock, both enjoying the view, but one of us was distracted.

Sometimes, when there are too many 'what ifs', reflecting on God, our rock, both reassures and steadies.

*God, the one and only — I'll wait as long as he says.
Everything I need comes from him, so why not? He's solid rock
under my feet, breathing room for my soul. An impregnable
castle: I'm set for life. (Psalm 62. 1-2, The Message)*

Sunday



The Isle of Skye is dominated by the jagged Cuillin mountains, a distinctive spine of rock. When we arrive there after the very long drive up, there is a sense of 'this is the place'.

Despite multiple visits and love of the scenery,

I have never scaled a Cuillin peak. It's not that I don't want to, but 'I'll do it when I'm fit', 'when I have the right walking shoes', 'a reliable guidebook', 'someone to go with'...

It's just as easy to put off getting to know God, and yet He is very close.

This commandment that I'm commanding you today isn't too much for you, it's not out of your reach. It's not on a high mountain — you don't have to get mountaineers to climb the peak and bring it down to your level and explain it before you can live it. And it's not across the ocean — you don't have to send sailors out to get it, bring it back, and then explain it before you can live it. No. The word is right here and now — as near as the tongue in your mouth, as near as the heart in your chest. Just do it! (Deuteronomy 30. 13-14, The Message)