

Thought for the day: 23-29 November 2020

by Rosemary Willis

[Monday]

The God of Hope

Over this extraordinary year and before, I walked the Meads. There are many walks to go, new places to see things from a different angle; to see things as they gradually change during the year. The tress bursting with new growth; the birdsong as it grows for the dawn chorus; and summer visitors coming and going. It made me appreciate what was right on my doorstep. Something other people did not have access to, those in high-rise flats or living in the urban jungle. My time walking gives me the opportunity to think before the day really starts, to help get things in perspective, to think about people and difficult situations. Walking helps me to think. This, I guess, is where I am praying, but I wouldn't call it that.

Even in these times when many avenues of pleasure have been closed off, we can clutter our lives with things to do to fill the time. Waiting for it all to be over.



I wait with hope that I will see the kingfisher; a glorious bird that's like a dagger, coursing just above the water. An azure blue arrow and then it's gone. An expression of God and his creation.

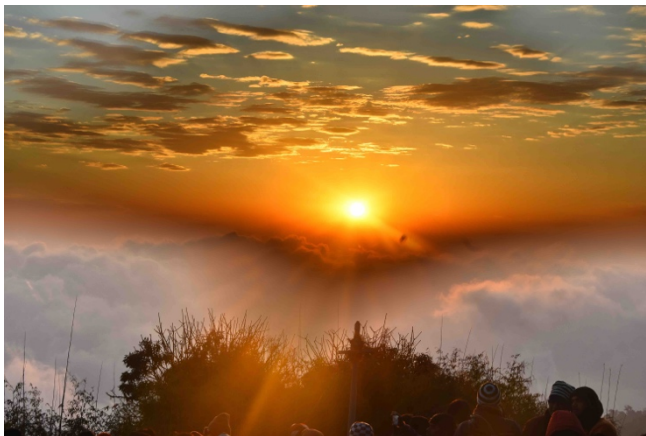
It's times like these when we have the opportunity 'to stand and stare' and appreciate what we have and what we have been given, even now.

We can wait expectantly, with an open mind, with the hope that God will guide our path and fulfill his promises and love us and comfort us in this time of waiting.

'Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.' (Romans 15. 13)

[Tuesday]

Morning light



You may know that my favourite time is the morning – everything is fresh and clean at the start of a new day. It even smells clean, especially after rain, and the day is ready to begin so full of life and potential.

One morning was particularly good and I remember it still. It may not have been that early, it all depends on the conditions really. Mist covered the Meads, swirling and rising from the water. I walked on in the half light.

The faint glow from the east caught my attention. Just a blurry glimmer of a change of colour, from grey nothing to pinky orange... slowly and continuously the full colour grew and then a half-risen ball of light gradually emerged from the mist. As I walked on, the full sun made an orange glow as though there was fire in the trees – a golden light. The way the sun shone through the trees was as though the glory of God shone around and the stone had been rolled away.

I could no longer watch the sun directly but turned to see each wave of land revealed gradually in all its glory in technicolor as the sun rose higher.

It seems to me that we are given each new day to start afresh – to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. And with each forgiveness there is a new resurrection.

Heavenly Father, help us use each new day carefully, thoughtfully, generously.

'And we all, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.' (2 Corinthians 3. 18)

[Wednesday]

The Birds



One of my walks seemed like a scene from *'The Birds'* (the Hitchcock/Daphne du Maurier film) - do you remember that?

It felt like the judgment by the crows as they sat sentinel on the wires as I approached the bench.

They were dressed all in black, standing in line waiting to give their verdict and then they all flew away. But it did make me think about how judgmental I am. Hardly give people a

chance sometimes. I have grown attached to the Meads as MY place of nurture and solace. What are all these other people doing walking round MY Meads; disturbing MY wildlife; not taking it seriously; not doing it MY way. There was one person who seemed to irritate me even more than others.

But I have been given opportunities to talk to some of these people. They have sad stories to tell of lockdown and what has happened to their relationships, their lives. Now I can understand things from another's point of view.

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. My favourite book.

If we can do that, we will be able to understand where people are coming from.

Do you remember the string Alan gave us? We were to tie three knots to represent the people we found difficult. I wonder if it changed your point of view. It did mine.

Father God, you have given us enough for our needs, help us to share all that we have - our time, our gifts and our resources. Help us to see others and their needs as you see them with love.

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.' (Luke 6. 37)

[Thursday]

Have you ever been lost? I mean really lost.

I can remember a time orienteering at night in Epping Forest. The idea was that our team of four would navigate our way

with map and compass to find pitched tents, some 'Lit' with a tiny light and others that were unlit, across a course spreading for 10 miles or so.



Once in the area of the tent - if our map reading was accurate - we would spread out to locate the tent, get our form signed to prove we'd found it and then move on to find the next. One of the team would stay put as a reference point and the

others would fan out to look for a very small, probably dark green, tent in the dark, in the middle of a forest. If we were in the right place, other teams would be around in the dark.

It's really odd how people can emerge and meld back into the undergrowth; one minute you have many people around crashing about and then none. And that's what happened. It's sometimes so difficult to know what direction you are going in and where anyone else is - and then the forest goes silent.

There is no one about. I started calling to see if I could locate a team member; then I started shouting at the top of my voice and then waiting, waiting to see if there was any sound calling back. I could feel the panic rising in my chest and had to physically calm myself. It will be ok, we will get back together. Then there was a voice. I was straining my ears to hear a voice I recognised. We called and called to find our way back together, and we made it.

Maybe God is like that. A still small voice. Calling us, calling us home.

After the earthquake and the fire, a still small voice.

Father God, give us the desire to listen to you through all the hurley burley of what life throws at us and guide us in all we think and say and do.

'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' (Ps 119. 105)

'In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.' (Proverbs 3. 6)

[Friday]

Mushrooms

I am often looking for gifts from the countryside – apples to eat or stew for crumble. Blackberries, of course, maybe some peas from a field. Plums by the canal side or from a place which once was a garden. At this time of year, it's mushrooms. Now, I am not an authority so I can only pick ones I am absolutely certain are field mushrooms. It's an uncertain death if I make a mistake.

On the Meads, I have gathered just two mushrooms, but they were both the size of a large dinner plate, about a pound in weight each. (I don't do new money.)

They are soft and lush, but this poem says it much better.

*The night before, a great moon full of honey
Had flowed up behind the hills and poured across the fields.
The leaves were rusting, the wheat whispered
Dry and gold in the wind's hands.*

*Andrew and I went to Foss. We drove over the hills
That were blustery with huge gusts of sunlight.
We stopped and walked to the loch, left two trails
Through the grass, came on the mushrooms by accident
A village of strewn white hats
The folds of their gills underneath as soft as skin.
We almost did not want to take them, as if
It would be theft, wronging the hills, the trees, the grass
But in the end we did, we picked them with reverence;
And they broke like bread between our hands, we carried whole
armfuls home,
Pieces of field, smelling of earth and autumn
A thanksgiving and a blessing.*

(Kenneth C Steven, Iona Poems)



Like another gift freely
given for us - the Body of
Christ, broken for us all.

*'While they were eating,
Jesus took bread, spoke a
blessing and broke it, and
gave it to the disciples,
saying, "Take and eat; this is My body."' (Matthew 26. 26)*

[Saturday]

Holy Spirit



Fowlmere, not far from Royston, is a lovely place to get back to nature – a small reserve with open reed beds and woodlands where there is a badger sett. I once met someone who said

the badger cubs were playing round his feet moments before I arrived – I was not to have that experience!

Still, there are plenty of other things on offer there: the quiet stream where water voles are often seen; the reeds beds where marsh harriers quarter the area looking for small mammals and somewhere to raise their young. But now, at this time of year, it's the starlings.

We waited; at first just me and then someone else came and then another. Were we in the right place? Would they come tonight? Would they perform?

The murmuration starts in the same way as our flock. One lone bird flies over the reeds, shortly followed by two more, and then 10 join and then another flock joins the assembled company. They fly around the reed bed disappearing and returning with more and more gathering, moving with one accord – no chance of me counting, but I am reliably told about 4,500 birds now.

How do they know? How can they work together like that – gathering? They twist and turn, roll and dip, sometimes a solid mass joining together in a ball of whirling birds, other times

they unfold into a strip of birds streaking to the edge of the reserve and then back. It's just glorious watching them.

They disappear round to the back of the reserve and I lose them – have they dropped and settled for the night somewhere else?

Then I hear them, gently at first and then like a rushing wind, as the whole flock flies above me whirling and diving over the reeds again - and then, in the end, they decide the show is over and pour down into the reeds like the one body they are.

This seemed like a spiritual experience for me and I wondered about the Holy Spirit - you might not hear it at first. You can't hear the wind unless it rustles the leaves on a tree to tell you it's there. You may not think the Holy spirit is there. But occasionally you may feel it like the gentle wind on your face and you just know. You just know.

Heavenly Father, pour down your Holy Spirit on us that we may feel your love poured out to give us comfort and peace.

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.' (John 14. 15)

[Sunday]

Reflections of God

Even in these difficult times I have managed to spend some time away from Hertford, walking and messing about in a boat. We travel from here to there, it doesn't matter too much where. It's just good to get out. There are bridges to negotiate and locks to work, which is all part of the fun.

On a bridge hole, someone had spent a great deal of time and effort to write backwards and upside down on the wall - it took

me time to work out what it was saying as we slowly travelled by. And then I saw it, reflected in the water.

'Everything is beautiful'

Even in brown murky water there was a reflection – it reminded me of the Ray Stevens song.

Everything is beautiful, in its own way

Like a starry summer night

On a snow-covered winter's day

And everybody's beautiful in their own way

Under God's Heaven

The world's gonna find the way.



But more than that, I thought of reflections of God. Each one of us is a reflection of God, whoever and whatever we are. And although we fall short sometimes, maybe most times – we try

and He knows we try. And He loves us.

'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you.' (Jeremiah 31. 3)

We are the Reflection of God's Glory.

May our life reflect God's glory each and every day through our words, our praise, our actions and our life here on earth.

What will you do today to reflect God's love in you?