

Thought for the day: 26 July–1 August 2021

by Phil Probert

Monday - Homeward bound

A few weeks ago, our community choir reunited after 15 months apart. It was wonderful! Distanced outdoors, we ended with the song 'Homeward Bound' - entirely apt given our longed-for return:

*'Home where my thoughts escapin'
Home where my music's playin'
Home where my love lies waitin'
Silently for me'*
(Simon & Garfunkel, 1966)

What does 'Home' mean to you?

I put this question to friends and family on Facebook and these themes came up: Family, Comfort, Security, Sanctuary, Shelter, Acceptance, Friends.

We should always be thankful for a place to call home, but it is more than four walls, isn't it? As the saying goes, 'Home is where the heart is'.

Where do you feel at home? It could be anywhere. Who you're with, how relaxed you are and how safe you feel all make a difference.



In the mid 90s, I travelled to the Scottish island of Iona for a week-long retreat with my

mum and two family friends. We stayed in the Abbey with people we had never met before; Mum and I had bunkbeds and shared a room with two nuns. We all took it in to turns to cook and to clean. We worshipped, prayed, sang, socialised and explored.

The pilgrimage across the island was a highlight but the beauty, simplicity and peace of the Abbey itself effortlessly stirred emotions. There was a dual sense of escape and yet connection. For me, aged 21, it was a personal and spiritual homecoming. All of the themes mentioned earlier applied.

I was home.



*Be a bright flame before me, O God,
a guiding star above me.*

*Be a smooth path below me,
a kindly shepherd behind me,
today, tonight and for ever.*

(From The Prayer of St Columba of Iona)

Tuesday - Patience

'Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient.' (James 5. 7-8)

Things so often take patience. They can't be rushed. When our winter season is upon us, it can be especially hard to imagine spring.

I've been plant-sitting for a friend, hosting some of her pots while she's without a garden. This makes me nervous because she is a 'proper' gardener who knows her onions, and I'm not.

When her pots arrived last winter, there was nothing to see but soil. Yet, just like in an episode of the superb series *Detectorists*, beneath the surface lay the treasure; out of sight was the potential.

With patience (one of those nine Fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians), we would be rewarded.

Sure enough, in April shoots appeared, and then the growth picked up pace so that by the middle of May one of the pots was packed with beautifully scented Lily of the Valley.



Quite a miracle really. Especially as I'd had a hand in it and I don't know my onions (or my Lily of the Valleys).

'But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.' (Romans 8. 25)

Wednesday - Longing to belong

"I don't know where I come from. What are my roots? Who do I look like? I don't feel as if I've got an anchor in life."

ITV's *Long Lost Family* always packs an emotional punch and Monday night's episode was no different.

51-year-old Paula lives in Scotland and had a happy childhood with her adoptive parents, but they were white and she was mixed race: "I always felt different," she said. Her birth mother refused contact and the series researchers discovered that her father had died many years ago. Far from that being the end of the story, though, it was the beginning of a whole new chapter.

Through DNA records, Paula's paternal aunts and uncles were found in Montana and they welcomed her with open arms, revealing that she's an American Indian – her grandfather, George, was part of the Comanche tribe in Oklahoma.

"It's life-changing," said Paula, "the feeling of belonging. I know where I come from now. It's a sense of contentment."

As Christians, we are called to welcome without prejudice. Our poster at church says it all: 'No one belongs here more than you'. And it's not about your name being on a list or your attendance being up-to-date; it's far more deep-rooted than that.

As author Brené Brown says in her book *Daring Greatly*, "Those who have a strong sense of love and belonging have the courage to be imperfect."

We long to belong; to feel connected; to be valued.

To be loved.

'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (John 13. 34-35)

Thursday - Strength in surrendering

The 2020 Olympics have hardly been conventional; they're taking place a year later than planned, for a start! I confess, I was sceptical about them going ahead at all, given the worries surrounding the pandemic infection rates and the restrictions involved.

To their credit, the competitors in Tokyo have already given us numerous jaw-dropping, tear-jerking, edge-of-the-seat moments and I've no doubt there are more to come. Despite the unusual circumstances, after years of dedicated training and a huge amount of recent uncertainty, the athletes have pushed themselves to their limits in front of the world and their achievements are amazing.

There is pride in representing your country, your team and yourself on the global stage. There is also enormous pressure. I hugely admire the way that US gymnast Simone Biles stepped back from competing for the sake of her mental health (and, in turn, her physical health); she explained openly and eloquently

that nothing – not even going for gold – is more important than her well-being. Far from letting anyone down, as some have suggested, she's demonstrated the wisdom and character of a true role model.



Pain comes in many forms. Just as we need to mend from physical injury, so we must be allowed time and space to heal

when we are mentally bruised. We are not a failure when we ask for help. We are not weak if we seek rest. There is strength in surrendering.

Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' (Matthew 11. 28)

Friday - Tune in

Please tell me I'm not the only one who hears tone in household appliances.

I don't mean that they speak to me with an attitude (imagine the kettle: "Are you seriously going to boil this much water for just one cup of tea?!). No, it's the hum, the sound they make. I can find myself tuning in as the oven purrs or the hairdryer whirrs... they have a tone.

It's a background noise that comes to the forefront. There are moments when it just 'clicks'; the sounds around me marry with my voice and I'm transported elsewhere, gifted an opportunity to escape in the moment.

Tuning into God, really hearing him, is an oasis of sorts and it can happen at any time. I believe God hears us no matter what, but perhaps we hear him better when we focus that bit more. As our pace relaxes and our breathing deepens, it can transform us, even just for a minute.

Slow down.
Listen.
Tune in.

And check out the tone from your kettle the next time you make a brew.

Saturday - Saving grace



What grade would I achieve in a competency test for Adulthood? I'm in my mid-forties, but in my head I'm considerably younger (around 23?) and there are times when, quite frankly, I don't feel qualified to do all the 'grown-up and responsible' stuff.

If I sat in the Mastermind chair with Christianity as my specialist subject, I wonder what score I would end up with then. I don't feel that I know or understand nearly enough.

Thankfully, the faith we have in God doesn't require trophies or top scores.

'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' (Hebrews 11. 1)

There's a divine mystery, an endless grace and an unconditional love that fuels this faith of ours.

Jesus' love is unfaltering for each and every one of us. He meets us in the midst of our messy, imperfect life. It's often so hard to take that in.

As the writer and speaker Mike Yaconelli so perfectly put it, Jesus will “love us right into his arms” (Messy Spirituality).



**Sunday 1 -
thought**

Pause for



so pause a while
step back, sit down
breathe in
breathe out
let go, turn round

still silence speaks
surrounding sound
within
upon
the golden crown

my eyes wide open
I have found
a resting place
my holy ground

Pips 2021