

Reflections and Prayers: 'Be still and know that I am God'

This is the 29th in a series of weekly Reflections and Prayers being offered to the Norley Methodist Church congregation and to colleagues and friends in many places near and far. They are kindly sourced by many people. You are invited to use them freely for personal reflection and to share and retain them as you wish.

Morning walks

Many of us have taken rather more exercise in the last six months we used to do, and we feel better for it. Joan and I have aimed to do four walks per week, and some of these reflections have made mention of them, their locations and people met along the way. Above all, following the same routes on several occasions between March and October, we became acutely aware of the truth in the harvest hymn 'By him, the rolling seasons in fruitful order move' (we used the whole verse at Norley on Sunday as a Call to Worship, at the start of a much pared down Harvest Thanksgiving). So to this week's reflection, for which we are indebted to Sarah Chadwick.

'Be still and know that I am God.' (Psalm 46 verse 10)

These words have run around my head since March. They have been my anchor throughout these troubling times. I hear them most when taking my morning walk - back in March, April and May this was my hour of government sanctioned outdoor exercise.

I live in a small village in what was part of the Leicestershire coalfields. There is no reason to visit the village unless you know someone who lives there. This walk has become a prayer walk for me. I usually walk alone and in spite of the bustle of the countryside and the roads beyond I am able to feel the stillness and to know that God is with me and around me. Occasionally hymns come to mind and if there's no-one else around I may sing a verse or two, but usually it's verses from the Bible that accompany me.

I take the steep hill heading out of the village and turn left along an overgrown road that now leads only to a viewing platform from where you can see deep into Cloud Hill Quarry. Before I reach the viewing platform, I see Breedon Hill beyond the quarry and remember the words of Psalm 121 'I lift up my eyes to the hills -- where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.'



Breedon Hill is now only half a hill. I wonder at the God given skill and ingenuity of those who quarry for stone in this area and who - within living memory - have removed half a hill. It gives some context to the words of Jesus in Matthew 17:20, 'Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'

On the half of the hill that remains is the church of St Mary & St Hardulph, Breedon on the Hill. Humankind has worshipped God there since at least 675 when a monastery was founded on the hill. The knowledge that men and women have practised their faith in this place for so many centuries helps to ground me in my faith.

The rock in Cloud Hill Quarry is Dolostone and was laid down about 10 million years ago. The quarry now descends to below sea level and the quarry vehicles that are too big for the roads look like Tonka toys at the bottom of it. Looking down into the quarry, seeing the layers of rocks, and up towards the church, reminds me that 'In the

beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1) and that God is indeed great and worthy of praise and that creation is wonderful.

Following the path that drops downhill alongside the quarry my thoughts usually turn away from creation to those people who have been on my mind and I pray for them and their needs while listening to the rustle of the trees that hug the path. In Elijah's meeting with God in 1 Kings 19:11 the Lord was not in the wind, but for me the sound of the wind in the trees is another confirmation that God is indeed around me and listening to me.

The path picks up the course of a brook as it draws closer to the village. Over the months I've watched how its level and velocity alters dramatically after rainfall. Another wonder of God's creation.

The path here has tall trees on either side and I often disturb a buzzard on this stretch of the walk. To see such a large bird rise just yards in front of you is awe-inspiring.

My day feels complete if I've seen a buzzard and on warm days I am sometimes lucky enough to see as many as five or six circling overhead. I know that they don't compare to eagles, but they're the biggest bird that my part of the world has to offer and again they take me to words of scripture and remind me that faith in God is a real help in difficult times. Isaiah 40:31 'those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.'



Returning closer to the village I pick up the track of the Ivanhoe Line (pictured below), now a popular cycle route running as far as Derby.

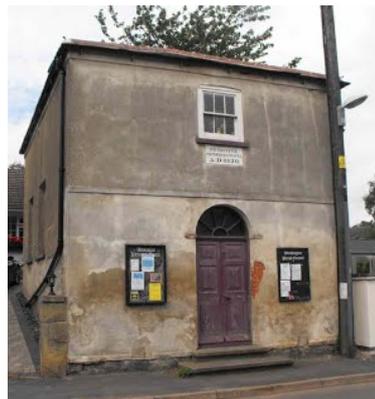


As I pass by the old station house I dodge tiny green apples under foot, fallen from a tree that must be a genuine seedling, grown from the pips in an apple core thrown from a train by a long ago traveler. The wonders of creation again.



In the distance I can hear the rumble of traffic on the A42 and my prayers turn to today's travelers and the wider world including those in authority and those working within the NHS and striving to find a vaccine for covid 19.

As I head back into the village I pass the parish church of St Matthew founded between 1175 and 1225. So many centuries of Christian worship. Between here and the Methodist chapel, with two centuries of witness this year, I pray for those closer to home by thinking of the people who live in each house that I pass.



And then home where all is quiet. ‘He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.’ (Psalm 46: 10-11)

Sarah Chadwick, October 2020, National Forest East Circuit, Nottingham & Derby District. All photos except those of the two village churches are by Sarah; St Matthew’s is from the church website (stmatthewsworthington.net) and the Methodist chapel from the circuit website (nfemc.org.uk).

Prayers for the moment

‘All is safely gathered in’

Creator God, we give thanks for the beauty of your world, the constancy of the seasons and, especially at this time of year, for the bounty of harvest, safely gathered in. We pray for all those who labour in all seasons and in all countries so that human needs, in their diversity, may be satisfied.

Eternal God, we give thanks that, in some places and for some people, we have gathered in worship again, ‘yet alive, to see each other’s face’. We remember and pray for those who were unable to join with us.

Loving God, we pray for all those unable to gather where and with whom they would wish at this time, as our comings and goings become more restricted for an unknown period. We reflect that being gathered in, for some, may bring a sense of safety, security and relief, while others may experience frustration and even a feeling of imprisonment. We pray especially with friends who are finding daily life tough.

In all things, and in our impotence to influence the course of events, we hear again the word of the Lord, *‘Be still and know that I am God; I am the Lord who saves and heals’,* and we may respond, *‘In you, O Lord, I put my trust.’*

John Bell, October 2020. The final words are StF 18, based on Psalm 46.

The hymn quoted in the first piece, by John S B Monsell, which begins ‘Sing to the Lord of harvest’, was published in ‘The School Hymn-Book of the Methodist Church’ in 1950 and is often known for J H Maunder’s wonderful anthem arrangement.

Note and encouragement to all readers

I have collected and compiled these reflections and prayers, including some of my own thoughts. If you wish to offer pieces for inclusion in future weeks, please send them to me at belljohna@btinternet.com Each edition will be released on a Friday so that it can be distributed for Sunday and the following week.

Any hymns are mostly referenced from their most recent publication in a British Methodist hymnbook (Singing the Faith – StF, Hymns and Psalms – H&P or even the 1933 Methodist Hymn Book – MHB), and, for URC readers, in Rejoice and Sing (R&S), the URC’s present hymnal.