

Mike's message

Mountains!

We've recently been away on holiday. This year we journeyed up to Scotland, specifically the Isle of Arran which is situated in the Firth of Clyde. It isn't far from Glasgow as the crow flies, but it could be a different world altogether. Arran's an island that is a microcosm of Scotland itself.

The southern part is lowland whereas the northern half is rugged mountain terrain. It is there, rising high above the seafront cottage we were staying in, that the island's highest peak is located - Goat Fell.

Goat Fell rises 874 metres (2866 feet) above sea level and at 7.30 one morning, together with youngest daughter Anastasia, I set out to climb it. It wasn't the best of conditions. It was raining and a bit windy but we accomplished the climb without too much difficulty and, from the summit, the view was

Well, to be honest there wasn't a view. We were in cloud and we couldn't see a thing. There's a cairn though, with a map on it showing us where everything would be seen if it was clear (see photo above). We sought what shelter there was in the rocks at the summit and ate some of the food we'd taken along. Then we made our way back down, arriving back at the cottage in the early afternoon. It had been a tiring walk but very rewarding. It's been a long time since I last climbed a mountain and I was reminded that, although it's tiring, it is in its own way refreshing. As you climb it's as if you're leaving behind the distractions and busyness of daily life. At the summit, even in wind and rain, there's a sort of peace and quietness. It reminded me of Elijah who, on a mountain, encountered God in "a sound of sheer silence" (1 Kings 19.12).

It reminded me that mountains are mentioned many times in the Bible. A quick search online lists 368 references. Among these are occasions when people climb mountains for a specific purpose. In Jesus' case he often "climbed a mountain to pray" (eg Mark 6.46, Luke 6.12 and 9.28). He appreciated the opportunity to leave behind the distractions and busyness of daily life to seek that peace and quietness too. Mountains are often depicted as places where God is encountered. As well as a troubled Elijah finding God in "a sound of sheer silence", we find Moses receiving the Law (Exodus 20), the disciples see the glory of God in Jesus' appearance (Mark 9.2) and later saying farewell and witnessing his departure (Matthew 28.16-20).

Not everyone has the opportunity to climb a mountain, but maybe all of us should find some way to escape the distractions and busyness of daily life to seek peace and quietness. Where can you escape to and find the "sound of sheer silence" in which to encounter God anew.

