HIDDEN RIVER CIRCUIT DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES

Edition 15: NOVEMBER 2025

Please take these articles week by week and read them slowly and reflectively, and may your life be enriched by God and by His Spirit who helps us understand more about God's love and presence in our everyday lives.

We welcome all of you reading this for the first time. We thank God for all His blessings as we seek to rejoice in the Good News of Jesus Christ in every way we can

Thank you to all who have contributed to this November edition

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WEEK 1: NOVEMBER 2Nd: Jonathan – Son of King Saul

A Reflection by John Worth

Forever linked with the name of King David is the name of Jonathan. "David and Jonathan" – held up as an example of real friendship. But where the Bible tells so much about the life of David – from shepherd boy to ruler of the two combined countries of Judah and Israel, we have to look a little closer to find out about Jonathan. He appears in just a few passages of the **first book of Samuel:**

Chapter 13

We meet Jonathan as a grown man, the son of King Saul, fighting against the Philistines. His father puts him in charge of 1000 men, and he defeats a Philistine garrison and kills the commander. So begins Jonathan's reputation as a warrior.

Chapter 14

Now Jonathan shows his independent spirit. On his own initiative, with just his armour bearer, he successfully attacks another small Philistine camp. The result of this is that there is a panic among the other Philistines in the area, and Saul and his troops were able to gain another victory.

During the battle Saul had given instructions that the soldiers were not to eat food. But Jonathan had not heard the order, and, feeling a lack of energy, when he came on a honeycomb, he scooped some and ate it. When he was told of his father's order, he criticised it. He had been renewed by eating, and felt that the men, too, would have benefitted from eating. We are not told whether he said this directly to his father!

Chapter 18

Now David enters the story. Having defeated Goliath, King Saul made him an officer in the army, and David achieved many victories. This made Saul jealous. However Jonathan and David had become great friends, swearing eternal friendship – a friendship that did last to the end of Jonathan's life, and which David then extended to one of Jonathan's sons.

Chapter 19

Saul's jealousy of David led him to plan to kill him. But Jonathan showed his loyalty to David by warning him, and also by reasoning with his father. On this occasion he was successful, and managed to calm Saul's anger. But this calm was short-lived. As soon as David returned, having achieved more victories over the Philistines, Saul sent men to kill him, but David escaped.

Chapter 20

Here is the story often told in Sunday School to show the friendship between Jonathan and David. The two friends meet and discuss the danger that David is in. David's absence from the New Moon Festival will be the test of the situation – what will be Saul's response to that absence? On the second day, Saul becomes angry and Jonathan tries to make apologies for David. But Saul becomes angry, and accuses his son of taking sides with David against his father – which, of course, he was. And Saul admits his intention to kill David. Jonathan's distress is shown by leaving and refusing to eat that day.

The friends' plan is put into operation. David hides in the field. Jonathan shoots an arrow beyond him – the signal that his life is in danger and he should escape. The friends meet for almost the last time, commit each other to God's keeping, and part, Jonathan to return to town, and David to go into hiding.

Chapter 23

There is one further meeting between the friends. David was in hiding in the wilderness, and Saul was searching for him. But it was Jonathan who actually found him and encouraged him to continue to trust in God, acknowledging that it would be David, and not Jonathan, who would succeed Saul as king. They then renewed their vows of friendship, Jonathan pledged his loyalty to David, and they parted. In **Chapter 31** there is a brief mention of Jonathan's death in battle.

Then in the **second book of Samuel, Chapter 1**, we read David's lament over Jonathan's death. In it he praises Jonathan's skill as a warrior, his bravery, and his great friendship.

David does not forget Jonathan's friendship. When he eventually becomes king, he honours that friendship by caring for Jonathan's crippled son Mephibosheth, restoring his land, seating him at the king's table.

Prayer.

Father, we thank you for the friends who share our lives, for the giving and receiving of care, of prayer and practical help, of trust. We reflect and thankyou for the friends we have had over the years, at different times in our lives, and the characteristics that made their friendship so good.

And we thank you that Jesus offers us His friendship – the best friendship of all:

Hymn: Hymns and Psalms 559: What a friend we have in Jesus

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Every thing to God in prayer.

2. Have we trials and temptations,

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged:

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful

Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness:

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

3. Are we weak and heavy laden,

Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Saviour, still our refuge –

Take it to the Lord in prayer!

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?

Take it to the Lord in prayer;

In His arms He'll take and shield thee,

Thou wilt find a solace there.

Joseph Medlicott Scriven

Week 2: NOVEMBER 9th : CRISIS

A Reflection by Mike Smith

Scripture: 1 Kings ch 19 vv 1-18

Mark ch 14 vv 32-39

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

This was the headline in the Sun newspaper in 1979 reporting on the activities of the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan. Answering questions on the state of the country, he said, "I don't think that other people in the rest of the world would share the view there is mounting chaos." He was rebuking the press for exaggerating the scale of the problems of the government – and perhaps at the same time reminding them that there is a difference between crisis and chaos, and it is the business of good government to confront crisis and prevent it from descending into chaos.

When people get together today to talk about our life situation you will sooner or later hear someone say "I never watch the late evening news on TV now – it's always bad and depressing, and gives me an anxious feeling to take with me to my dreams." It is an admission that so much of what is going on in the world, and in our own country too, has all the hallmarks of crisis, and the fear is that it could all so easily go down the slippery slope into chaos. The crisis has its bases in three socially destructive evils:

1. **Hatred** based on race or lifestyle differences
2. **Contempt** for authority; there are no moral imperatives; leaders such as parents, teachers, politicians, judges, policemen and clergy are as full of faults as everyone else, so it is OK to ignore inconvenient rules of conduct.
3. **Violence**: take what you want and attack anyone who tries to remonstrate with you.

Of course it is thankfully true that not all people are that evil, and for the moment at least life goes on relatively smoothly for the greater part of the human race. However it is the uncomfortable

feeling of many of us that the wrong people have the power of control over what is happening to our history: hatred and lawlessness and war are a real and present threat, and decent people feel powerless to stop the movement towards chaos.

SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

The first thing to get clear is that, sad as it is, none of this is new; crisis has always been a part of the human story, and has often led on to chaos and the destruction of people's lives. And if this is true, then it must also be true that the Bible will take the experience of crisis in hand and try to trace the role of God in responding to it. The clues are given us in two characteristic encounters where prayer becomes an appeal to God *in a context of crisis*: **Elijah** in fear of the deadly wrath of a corrupt monarchy, and **Jesus** burdened with the prospect of rejection and terrible suffering at the hands of the Jewish Establishment.

First**, Elijah**. One might have assumed that he would be overjoyed at his victory over the Baal worshippers at Carmel (See 1 Kings chapter 18); yet the next chapter portrays him as a man fleeing for his life, in despair, full of a sense of failure, at the end of his spiritual resources, a man *in crisis*: "It is enough" (ch 19 v4) should perhaps read "I've had enough!" The drama of the encounter lies in what God has to say to the prophet in dealing with the crisis: firstly, guiding him to the "still, small voice" of inward conviction and away from the symbols of Divine power he might have expected - earthquake, storm wind and volcanic inferno – and secondly giving him new work to do: *"Go back… and anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel… and Elisha to be prophet in your place… I shall leave seven thousand in Israel, all who have not bowed the knee to Baal*." (ch 19 vv15 – 18). And Elijah returns to his mission – the downfall of the corrupt King Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel - with confidence renewed in the future of the people; a man changed as he prays.

And then there is **Jesus**: master of himself and portrayed as being in control of every situation through sheer strength of character? But no! The gospels are honest enough to avoid turning him into Superman! And at the onset of night in Gethsemane we come upon a very human being in severe crisis. Not all the early manuscripts of Luke mention the sweat falling like blood from him, and this detail is not found at all in Matthew or Mark, but the mental anguish is real and clear enough: and it was not just fear for his own ordeal to come, but also a real sense of failure and rejection, and sorrow for the vulnerable men who would follow him into the same fate – now sleeping as Jesus prayed, and unaware of what Jesus knew was about to unfold. But notice the similarity between the experience of Elijah and of Jesus: in each man's crisis, no Voice from Heaven, just a profound silence in which emerges a realisation, a revelation, that the way forward is inevitable, inevitably painful but inevitably all in the plan of God to confront and destroy the power of evil. Like Elijah, Jesus rises from his prayer a changed man, ready to accept in calm trust what must be.

Such is God's answer to crisis: we pray about it – on the understanding that prayer is not about asking God to sweep in and change the crisis situation, but is about ourselves being changed to meet the needs of the situation. Because God chose to take the huge risk of making us in his likeness, the terms and conditions of the package are that both as individuals and collectively we are free to make our own moral decisions, for good or ill, and so must accept responsibility for our problems and for ourselves seek solutions to them by choosing obedience to his rules. The guidance offered through prayer is there, but it serves as persuasion rather than compulsion!

The final resolution of the human crisis is another matter, of course, but that lies in the future plan of the Great Shaper of history which we are powerless to predict or control.
But in the here and now, what are the prospects for a solution to our immediate crisis of agony? It is clear from Scripture that once we make space in our lives and allow God to control, wonderful things do happen:

To pray is to sit open-handed before God. *Peter van Breenen, Jesuit*

The living Church, though never neat, keeps God's world from complete disaster... Where people are praying for peace the cause of peace is being strengthened by their very act of prayer, for they are themselves becoming immersed in the spirit of peace.

George Macleod, founder of the Iona Community

Great simplicity of heart sustains contemplative prayer. Simplicity is a source of joy. It enables us to surrender ourselves to God, to allow ourselves to be led to him... Silence in prayer seems like nothing. And yet in this silence the Holy Spirit can enable us to welcome God's joy... And we can make this discovery: it is sometimes in demanding situations that human beings become most fully themselves.

Brother Roger, founder of the Taizé Community

Hymn: Be Still my Soul! By Katharina Amalia Dorothea von Schlegel

Tune Finlandia

1. Be still, my Soul!
   The Lord is on your side;

Bear patiently, the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In every change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul! Y
our best, your heavenly friend
Through thorny way leads to a joyful end.

2. Be still, my soul!
   Your God does undertake

To guide the future as he has the past;
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul!
The waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while he lived below.

3. Be still, my soul!
   When dearest friends depart

And all is darkened in the vale of tears,
Then shall you better know
his love, his heart,
Who comes to soothe
your sorrows and your fears.
Be still, my soul!
Your Jesus can repay
From his own fullness all he takes away.

4. Be still, my soul!
   The hour is hastening on
   When we shall be forever with the Lord,
   When disappointment, grief,
   and fear are gone,
   Sorrow forgot,
   love's purest joys restored.
   Be still my soul!
   When change and tears are past,
   All safe and blessed
   we shall meet at last.

Week 3: November 16th: EYE FOR EYE
A Reflection by Mike Smith

Scripture: Matthew ch 5 vv 38-48

My object all sublime I shall achieve in time
To let the punishment fit the crime, the punishment fit the crime.

Thus the Mikado, the Emperor of Japan in the famous Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, declares his policy towards those in his kingdom who flout the law. He claims: "A more humane Mikado never did in Japan exist!" – but then he gives the lie to that by gleefully describing a series of exquisitely painful procedures for the correction of those who are unfortunate enough to get caught! In the real world of course rulers have to deal with the problem of striking a balance between certainty of just and unpleasant punishment, which might deter the would-be criminal, and measures designed to reform the lifestyles and character of convicted offenders and avoid a return to crime – "when mercy seasons justice" in the words of Portia in her defence of Antonio.

In the Matthew passage Jesus draws us into scrutiny of an important principle of justice laid down in the Law of Moses: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". The phrase appears three times in the legal sections of the Torah, each time with a different application:

Exodus ch 21 vv 22 – 24 *When, in the course of a brawl, a man knocks against a pregnant woman so that she has a miscarriage but suffers no further injury, the offender must pay whatever the woman's husband demands, after assessment. But where injury ensues, you are to give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn,bruise for bruise, wound for wound*. Pretty rough justice, but not out of keeping with the era of its formulation. The failure to recognise the rights of the dead foetus is again typical of the age: at that time, a child had no identity as a person before birth; on the other hand, the wife was the valuable property of her husband and compensation was due!

Leviticus ch 24 vv 10 – 16 & vv 17 – 22 A man with mixed parentage is subject to the same rule as an Israelite with regard to blasphemy, and is stoned to death by the community. This rule was what prompted the stoning of Stephen for utterances seen as blasphemy by the Council (see Acts ch 7 vv 54-60). Also the eye-for-eye principle applies to injury to one's fellow countryman, or even to an animal belonging to a fellow countryman. At this stage, injured foreign people and animals were also entitled to compensation if they were residents among the Israelites – quite an enlightened step forward for the time!

Deuteronomy ch 19 vv 16-21 Making false accusations against another person, if proved to be false, will render the false witness liable to incur the penalty for the crime with which he had accused the innocent party. Perjury has always been taken very seriously in court proceedings, and is condemned in the Ten Commandments; in the days before the array of forensic evidence gathering resources available today, a case might well be proved unjustly simply on the testimony of two false witnesses. A significant example of this is the case against Naboth, who was condemned to death on a false charge of blasphemy levelled at him by two witnesses bribed to perjure themselves. They got away with it: Naboth lost his family's vineyard, and his own innocent life, through the corrupt action of King Ahab (First Book of Kings, chapter 21).

To understand the Old Testament concept of justice it is necessary to begin with the Israelite picture of God: One who will not tolerate false images of Himself created by people who don't worship Him as He really is; who punishes disobedience but keeps faith with those who keep his laws (Exodus ch 20 vv 4-6). On that basis, since God is just, his human creatures must also behave justly towards each other or face the consequences of wrongdoing. This also implies that the person who is injured is entitled to exact retribution for the wrong suffered. This applies within the tribal Covenant community of Israel but also beyond into the pagan world in general; when the Israelites left Egypt and settled in Canaan they faced years of territorial wars with tribes who regarded them as invaders (which in fact they were); the Israelites however felt justified in destroying whole communities who, from the Israelite point of view, were "heathens" standing in the way of the Chosen People of God as they annexed the land "promised to Abraham". In most wars there is wrong on both sides. The unedifying tale of the indiscriminate slaughter of the Amalekites and of how Samuel "hewed [their king] Agag in pieces before the LORD" (1 Samuel ch. 15) illustrates the relentless brutality of war – and even more tragically, the inherent uncertainty of what is meant by "justice" in the minds of differing people.

Perhaps this is where we see Jesus walking away from the traditional interpretation of the Mosaic Law and urging his hearers to reconsider the eye-for-eye, tooth-for-tooth, life-for-life rule. *"Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish but to* ***complete.****.. Unless you show yourselves better than the scribes and Pharisees, you can never enter the kingdom of Heaven... You have heard that they were told...* ***but what I tell you is this…"*** And what follows is controversial, difficult: turn the other cheek and love your enemies. Does Jesus expect us to give way, act weakly as cowards, when we are abused? Why should we do favours for people who exploit us? Clearly there is a need for explore what Jesus is saying about our relationship with those who are actively opposed to our values and our way of life.

Essentially Jesus parts company with those who teach that when we say "God is righteous" we mean "God never lets a wrong go unpunished". According to Jesus, we should love our enemies because ***God is like that***: *"Only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the innocent and the wicked."*

As we have seen, "justice" is a dangerous word with many meanings. To follow the pattern of Jesus, who hated no one, we need to safeguard our thinking and attitudes:

Firstly, recognise the difference between justice and **revenge**. Most of the family and tribal feuds, and most of the wars in history, could have been avoided if the will to "get even" over some real or imagined injury had been eliminated. Perhaps if the victorious allies had been more generous to the Germans and helped them to recover from the disastrous effects of the First World War, instead of imposing humiliating punitive economic penalties, who knows if resentment might have failed to take root, Hitler's rantings might have been ignored and the Second World War might not have happened. Forgiveness is incredibly hard, but incredibly effective in restoring peace.

Secondly, a closer look at the **meaning of "love**" is required. We are not thinking here about emotion, affectionate attachment to someone we find charming. It means trying to understand people as we find them, nice or nasty, and try to find something we have in common which we can use as a basis for mutual acceptance. Zacchaeus the tax collector was a nasty little man hated by the Jews for taking their hard-earned cash and giving it to the Romans (apart from what he fiddled into his own pockets). Jesus also saw a man who foolishly sacrificed friendships for the sake of easy money, and found himself paid back by loneliness. Jesus' remedy was ingeniously simple: an offer of friendship, inviting himself to supper with the man with whom nobody wanted to share a meal socially. The result was a changed Zacchaeus, no longer one of "the lost". (Luke ch 19 vv 1-10)

Thirdly, there is no guarantee of success when seeking reconciliation with an enemy. Jesus failed to penetrate the hearts and minds of the Jewish Establishment; the teaching he offers to today's society also falls largely on deaf ears. All we can do is to be sure we have tried, and leave the outcome to *che serà serà* . The Holy Spirit does still work for change in the human heart; some of the sower's seeds will grow. Some of the Scribes and Pharisees did listen; some people today still find the Saviour. Every age has its Zacchaeus ready to respond to kindness.

Reflection

Never cease loving a person, and never give up hope for him, for even the Prodigal Son who had fallen most low could still be saved. The bitterest enemy and also he who was your friend could again be your friend; love that has grown cold can kindle again.

Søren Kierkegaard

1. **My hope is built on nothing less**
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand.

2. **When darkness veils his lovely face,**
I rest on his unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.

3. **His oath , his covenant, his blood,**
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around, my sould gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

4. **When he shall come with trumpet sound,**
O may I then in him be found:
Dressed in his righteousness alone
Faultless to stand before the throne.

WEEK 4: NOVEMBER 23: HEROES

A Reflection by Karen Drayton

Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 17.1-51

I recently heard an opinion that young people do not have the heroes they need when they are growing up in today's world. Heroes to help them rise above their current situations, to aspire to do great things, to dream big.

I wonder - who were your heroes when you were growing up?

As I was brought up in India, mine was a lady called Ramabhai. She was born a highborn Hindu in 1858, and was married at age 9 to an older man who died when she was 24. Her parents died in a famine. She had been taught to read and recite Sanskrit, the ancient holy language of India by her father and they had travelled round India teaching and reciting Sanskrit. Her and a remaining brother continued this practice, but there was much resistance to women learning to read and be educated, so she decided to help girls and other young widows and women get an education. She became a feted scholar, went to the UK and converted to Christianity, and then went to the US to raise funds In 1889, Ramabai returned to India, and founded a school for child widows in Pune called Sharada Sadan. Although Ramabai did not engage in overt evangelism, she did not hide her Christian faith either, and when several students converted to Christianity, she lost the backing of Hindu

reformers circles. In 1896, during another severe famine, Ramabai toured the villages of Maharashtra with a caravan of bullock carts and rescued thousands of outcast children, child widows, orphans and other destitute women, and brought them to the shelter of her Mukti (freedom) Mission. By 1900 there were 1,500 residents and over a hundred cattle in the Mukti mission. A learned woman knowing seven languages, she also translated the Bible into her mother tongue—Marathi—from the original Hebrew and Greek. The Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission is still active today, providing housing, education, vocational training, etc. for many needy groups including widows, orphans, and the blind. .

One day, while she was staying at Mukti Mission, the money and food to feed all the people had run out completely. The many children inside were in danger of starvation. But they all knelt down and prayed and prayed. They prayed that somehow the children in the orphanage would get food that day.

And just then, a cart passing the gates of the orphanage broke down – the axle of the wheel broke, and all the piles of food on the cart, which was on its way to market, fell on the floor. The drivers of the cart were horrified that they could no longer sell all the food, and they were glad to give it to the children of the orphanage.

I loved stories like this, of the power of prayer and how miraculous things could happen. You may remember stories of George Mueller in Germany, another prayerful social activist like Pandita Ramabhai. They were heroes, having the faith to pray and believe their prayers would be answered.

In the Bible there are many heroes, stories of ordinary people old and young, men and women, whom we have heard about.

There is Queen Esther, who wanted to save her people, but had to be ready to sacrifice her life for it.

There was Moses who had to stand up and free his people when he didn't want to.

There was Daniel who chose the Lion's den over bowing down to foreign gods.

There was obedient Abraham who left his home place at age 78 and started somewhere else.

There was Samuel at age 8 who heard God calling him loud and clear.

So there are heroes in the Bible and heroes in the world, and they all have much in common.

1) They knew what **the right thing to do** was – Ramabhai knew that the children needed feeding, and that God wanted to provide for them. Esther and Moses knew that her people needed saving. Daniel knew it was not right to bow to other Gods.
2) They had the **courage to do what they knew was right** – they were willing to take risks, to be different, to sacrifice their own lives for what was right.
3) They had the **humility to know that they didn't do things in their own strength**. They knew they were only human, but they knew that God was on their side.

   They knew they couldn't do everything, but they knew they could do something for God.

As I write this, I am sitting in Sarenga, a very rural place in West Bengal India, where my Methodist Missionary parents began their work in 1952. This week, Dipti, a 52 year old from the UK came to sprinkle the ashes of her mother, Elizabeth Hunter, a nurse/midwife from England, under the banyan tree where she used to hold the clinics. Elizabeth had worked here in the 1966-1974s, and sadly died last year. Dipti was adopted by her 50 years ago, after her biological mother died in childbirth. Dipti is

a lawyer in London, a far cry from the life she would have had if she had lived here. So we have celebrated the life of Sister Hunter, who helped train nurses and build the current nursing training school, which continues to train students every year, in a unique Christian environment. The hospital here continues to help patients have the care they need, and women to have their babies safely. Sister Hunter is also a hero – leaving her native Yorkshire village, learning the local language, and living without electricity, home comforts or family here in the rural area of West Bengal.

We can't all be heroes and leave our countries to share the good news of Jesus , but we can all be heroes by listening to what God is calling us to do, by having the courage to follow it through, and the humility to know that we need God alongside us.

It takes courage to stay in our home places, to be obedient and courageous and faithful.

We are all ordinary people – but with access to God's amazing power to make us extraordinary heroes.

Prayer

Lord the world needs many heroes – to stand up for what is right, to be courageous and brave to do what is right, and to be humble enough to know that without you we can do nothing very effective.

Lord, help us to be heroes in whatever role you have put us. Thankyou for those who have gone before us.

Help us to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you.

Be with us today as we seek to listen to your voice.

Hymn: The saints of God

1) I sing a song of the saints of God,

Patient and brave and true

Who toiled and fought and lived and died

For the Lord they loved and knew.

And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,

And one was a shepherdess on the green;

They were all of them saints of God

And I mean, God helping, to be one too.

2) They loved their Lord so dear, so dear,

And his love made them strong,

And they followed the right for Jesus' sake,

The whole of their good lives long.

And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,

And one was slain by a fierce wild beast;

And there's not any reason, no not the least,

Why I shouldn't be one too.

3) They lived not only in ages past;

There are hundreds of thousands still

The world is bright with the joyous saints

Who love to do Jesus will.

You can meet them in school, on the street or the shops

In church by the sea, in the house next door

They are saints of God whether rich or poor,

And I mean to be one too.

Lesbia Scott

WEEK 5: 30th NOVEMBER 2025: What does God Require of Us?

A Reflection by Karen Drayton

Scripture reading: Micah 6.6-8

There was once a man who wanted to meet God so he went and studied with a guru for many years.

After some years he left the guru, with his loincloth as his only possession.

He settled by the river in one village and lived his simple life, meditating on God for all the hours of the day, with his food being given by the kind villagers. He had learnt that possessions separate us from thinking about God, and being with God.

But one day when he was washing in the river, some mice nibbled at his one loincloth and ripped it to shreds.

So he needed another loincloth.

He decided to get a cat to prevent the mice eating his new loincloth and causing the same problem.

But the cat needed milk to drink so with the money he got from donations, he bought himself a cow.

The cow provided lots of milk for the man and the cat and the villagers.

But the cow also needed feeding so he bought a field and grew some crops for the cow to eat, and there was so much, he could sell it, and so he made himself a bigger house on top of the hill as his old hut kept getting flooded .. ..and then he had so many things in the house to manage, that he thought he may as well have a wife to help him, then he had children and grandchildren and so life went on.

One day his guru came by looking to see how his student was getting on. He looked for him in the broken down hut by the river, but he was not there. The villagers pointed up to the hill - oh no he lives in that big house up there!

Wow! said the guru, and to think he started with just one loincloth!!...

So what is the meaning of this story....??

We find it difficult to live with few possessions?

One thing leads to another?

God continually provides us with blessings?

Do you think the man with the Loincloth had more or less time to focus on God after he had amasses all those possessions?

You would probably agree he had less time because he had so many things to think about – cats, crops, house maintenance, his wife, children, grandchildren, in laws. Most of us are not called to be gurus or people with only a loincloth (we need a bit more to cover ourselves up!), but God wants us to spend some time with him. He doesn't want us to be so busy that we have no time to be grateful to him for all we have, to share stories of our days with him, to laugh at funny things, to cry over things that make us sad, to ask him for help, to ask him to help others we care about.

During my recent trip to the UK I was looking for a book I needed. I spent so much time looking (unsuccessfully) through all the boxes I have, for this book. I always feel I have too many things and I waste a lot of time looking for things, with less time for talking to God. Alternatively, I could have a bigger house with lots of bookcases then I wouldn't have to look through all the boxes !! Life is never simple, especially as a Christian trying to do the right thing.

In Micah Chapter 6 v.6 Micah asks the question:

What does GOD require of us?

Does God want burned offerings, thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil, our first born children as sacrifice – NO! God wants us -

To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with him.

In the Garden of Eden, when God created human beings, in their paradise, God and humans used to walk together of an evening, with the evening breeze rustling the leaves, dusk falling gently, birds calling as they settled in for the night – isn't it a lovely image? _ God walking so closely with us… concerned about the intimate details of our day, having nothing else to do herself but to listen to us, and to walk and laugh and enjoy our company..

What God requires of us is not fasting, or burned offerings, or having no possessions, it is a gift of ourselves – sharing the minutiae of our lives with our Creator, being grateful to our Maker and provider of all things. Looking at our concerns and our worries through his eyes. Offering our concerns for others knowing that God wants the best for all of us, and he asks us to pray and act for justice, to be merciful – to be kind, forgiving and non-judgemental in our attitudes. The more we walk with God, the more we can be made in God's own image.

So my reminder this morning is, remember what God asks of us: despite all your activities, despite all your possessions, make sure you have time to walk with God in all your daily life. When you wake and eat, when you sit and think, when you go about your daily life, when you lie down to sleep, and when you are awake at night, thank God for all your possessions, and his blessings, and share your life in all its complexity with him. May God Bless you. Amen

Prayer: Lord, we offer you our whole selves and all our lives. Help us live with our possessions and activities wisely, leaving time for musing with you. Help us to enjoy walking with you and sharing our daily lives with you. Help us to be aware of all your communication with us. Amen.

Hymn by Alfred Ackley (1887-1960)

1) I serve a risen Savior
He's in the world today.
I know that He is living,
Whatever men may say.
I see His hand of mercy;
I hear His voice of cheer;
And just the time I need Him
He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

2) In all the world around me
I see His loving care,
And though my heart grows weary,
I never will despair;
I know that He is leading,
Through all the stormy blast;
The day of His appearing
Will come at last.

3) Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian,
Lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs
To Jesus Christ the King!
The Hope of all who seek Him,
The Help of all who find,
None other is so loving,
So good and kind.