

Junior Church: Young Peoples' Group
Some Thoughts for the Week Beginning 14th June 2020

Hello Everyone,

It's good to be writing to you again. Another week of lockdown goes by but with further easing of the restrictions. Preparations are being made for non-essential shops to open next week, but sadly not barbers or hairdressers. I badly need a haircut. A colleague of mine sent me this morning a picture of his puppy, back from the groomers and looking very smart. It seemed odd that his dog could have a haircut but I couldn't. Then I had an idea... Cutting a man's hair probably requires less skill than that of a dog and I would not wriggle as much.

It was lovely to encounter Tapiwa and then Henry and Grace this week on my journey round the Common. Meeting real people makes me feel connected to the wider world and to my friends in Redhill Methodist Church. I have made another friend on the Common. First it began with a friendly wave and then we moved on to a 'hello, how are you' and then a bit of a chat. He has quite a striking appearance, very like Gandalf in the films of Lord of the Rings, with his long white hair and long beard. I call him 'the wild man of the Common'. Then I began to wonder if, with my ever-lengthening hair, he saw me as a fellow traveller, a second wild man of the Common.

These chance encounters are special moments in the journey through lockdown when contact with others is so restricted. I found myself thinking more about journeys and the people we meet on the way. First there was the refund of my ticket on the Eurostar, a reminder of a journey that was never taken. Then it was Josh's birthday. He's my godson. Three years ago we met for a chat and he told me of an idea he had to cycle from Bristol or Beijing. I thought it was just a pipe dream but several months later he set off and, over the next 18 months, sent back blogs of his adventures. He cycled 25,425 km across 27 different countries. The hottest temperature was 43 degrees, the lowest -41 degrees. It was a journey fraught with difficulties and there were times when he was close to giving up. There is absolutely no doubt that he succeeded only because of the incredible kindness and hospitality of the people he met. He was given clothing, food and shelter by people he had never met before and would never meet again. I'll return to Josh later.

Then I was reading a little book of poetry by [Emma Major](#) written over the lockdown period: 'Little Guy: Journey of Hope' (Wild Goose Publications). This describes a journey of the mind that led from loneliness and fear to confidence and broader horizons. Little Guy is aided on his journey by a closer bond with nature and company, first of a cat and then another human being. The poems are beautifully illustrated although Emma Major is blind and never had any particular talent for illustration when she could see. She believes that God gave her the images and the urgency to produce them for the benefit of those feeling vulnerable and lonely during lockdown.

Underlining the importance of people to share the journey through lockdown and through life itself, I heard the story of carer Caroline Sinfield ([‘How my carer saved me during lockdown’ – BBC](#)) who left her own world behind to care for Shannon, a young Down’s Syndrome woman who had lost her mother to cancer, broken her ankle and then contracted Covid-19. Caroline’s decision to accompany Shannon through lockdown made a huge difference to both of them.

Finally, there is the bible passage for this week that seems to fit very nicely with these themes of journeying and chance encounters. The passage is from Matthew’s Gospel ([Matthew 9.35 – 10.10](#)). As the passage opens we see the human side of Jesus, journeying through towns and villages, working his socks off (although he probably wasn’t wearing any) to meet the spiritual and physical needs of ordinary people and feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the task. I imagine doctors and nurses in ICUs throughout the country at the height of the pandemic experienced the same feelings.

Jesus could not manage by himself and he turns to the twelve disciples to help him. He refers to them as ‘apostles’, from the Greek word ‘to send forth’. Jesus tells them to take the bare essentials with them on their journeys, advice that seems extreme to us. But then I think of Josh who took with him only what he could carry on a bike. I wonder if Jesus realized that the people who would respect their lack of possessions would offer them hospitality, thus providing opportunities for chance encounters that would spread the Gospel.

And finally, what of Josh? He made it to Beijing and travelled on to South Korea. Two days before Christmas he thought of his family and how lovely it would be to taste his mum’s cooking again and be with his brothers and sister. Without telling them he caught a flight home and found himself on the doorstep of the family home. The words ‘prodigal’ and ‘son’ come to mind except they did not see him coming from far away. His mum opened the door and saw a young man dressed in a thick overcoat that a Russian railway worker had given Josh to protect against the Russian winter, holding a cardboard box that the airline had given him so that his possessions could be stored in the hold. She thought it was an Amazon delivery. But there was a feast and much joy that Christmas.

Wishing you joy and some wonderful chance encounters this week.

Rodney