

Junior Church: Young Peoples' Group

Some Thoughts for the Week Beginning 19th July 2020

Hello Everyone,

As the school holidays arrive and life gets back to as normal as it is going to be for the foreseeable future, I'm making this my last thought for the week. I will take a little bit of holiday too, get my hair cut, stretch my legs and meet up with friends. I have enjoyed writing each week. It has been part of the routine of the lockdown and it helps me to remember you all and to try to appreciate what life has been like for young people and others in this country and abroad who have found lockdown and the fear of catching the virus particularly difficult.

We are still contemplating the [Book of Ruth](#). Last week I emphasized the challenges facing Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, as migrants between two hostile lands. I drew parallels with modern day refugees and suggested that today the hardships and emotional upheavals faced by those forced to leave their home and seek refuge in a foreign land are no different to those experienced by Ruth and Naomi. The challenges are not just physical but emotional too: leaving behind people who have been the bedrock of their lives and seeking to establish new relationships with people who may be hostile.

It so happened that I came across a poignant and sensitive news clip by the [BBC's Caroline Hawley this week](#). She's been reporting for five years on the plight of a young Syrian girl and her family, forced out of their home after a horrific chemical attack and now living in a refugee camp in Lebanon. The piece was entitled 'Rouaa's New Home'. Conditions in the camp were very poor with limited water, poor sanitation and a home that leaked. Now nine years old, Rouaa had been offered an opportunity to settle in England. The film followed her leaving the camp and saying goodbye to some of her family and her friends, perhaps never to see them again. Only a series of photographs would remind her of where she had come from and those who were important to her. The film captures the excitement as she and her family move into their new home. But Caroline Hawley also sounds a note of caution: 'the quality of life will depend on the warmth of the welcome she gets here' and notes: 'there is some hostility to immigrants here'.

Rouaa and her family want to make a contribution to their adopted country. Her father, in an act that is as much symbolic as practical, plants coriander and parsley seeds. These seeds seem to represent a desire to put down roots, to make their mark, to invest in their adopted country and to believe in a brighter future.

The lectionary readings at the moment from Matthew Chapter 13 feature stories told by Jesus that involve the planting of seeds. When I watched Rouaa's father planting and harvesting his coriander and parsley it reminded me of the story of the mustard seed ([Matthew 13.31-32](#)). Although one of the tiniest of seeds it can grow to a tree of considerable size and, when it does, provides a home for birds and, no doubt, other wildlife. If Rouaa is given a chance to grow and reach her potential she will learn the language, make friends and embrace the education offered to her that she craves. She in turn will be able to

offer hospitality, shelter and friendship to others. We can only hope and pray that she, like Ruth and Naomi, find acceptance and love in their adopted homeland.

On 30th of this month it is [United Nations International Day of Friendship](#). The UN website defines friendship in terms of camaraderie and trust between peoples, countries, cultures and individuals. Friendship is a powerful influence that builds bridges and 'weaves a safety net that will protect us all'. Our best chance of finding a coronavirus vaccine is for countries to work together and share their expertise and knowledge. That is true of solutions to world hunger, climate change and the decline in the world's biodiversity for example. How critical I think Jesus would be of international politics today and its impact on vulnerable people such as Rouaa.

Friendship is perhaps the most precious of all God's gifts. Each of us, through the network of friends that we develop throughout our lives, has a chance to build a peace and contentment that reaches beyond us. The key to maintaining those friendships is never to take them for granted, to work at them when things are difficult and to keep the lines of communication going. That will be my advice to Mr Johnson, Mr Putin, Mr Trump and Mr Xi Jinping when I'm next invited to the World Summit. I'll remind them of Rouaa and other children like her.

Have a wonderful summer holiday. I'm looking forward to the day when we can sit down together in the same room and reflect on the last few months and look forward in faith.

Rodney