



Charity number 1172058

Offering spiritual care in later life

Thought for the day, 17-5-20: on Psalm 31



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When I think of waiting, I think of dentists' waiting rooms, of queues with snaking lines outside popular events, of being stuck in traffic with fractious children on a hot



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summers day, windows open to reduce heat, but invasive exhaust fumes assaulting one's nose and throat.

Do you remember awaiting the results of a crucial examination that could decide your future?

Or perhaps your experience is like that of my neighbour, anxiously awaiting the results of a medical scan.



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Waiting impatiently, or with dread, and when a letter arrives with the long awaited results, delaying its opening. Looking at the letter, reaching for it; then as rapidly withdrawing from it, circling it like a dangerous animal, treating it like a trap waiting to be sprung. The waiting has turned the letter into a threat; you must open it, yet its contents might be toxic.

There are so many different ways of playing the waiting game.

"Be strong and let your heart take courage,
All you who wait for the LORD."

So what sort of waiting are we doing?

Standing on the walls, like Habakkuk, demanding answers? Almost forcing the issue? You *will* give me an answer!

Or perhaps involved in a titanic struggle, lasting all night, wrestling in close combat with the divine, as Jacob did at Bethel?

Or perhaps fuming with haste and impatience and jumping the gun, as Saul did with the sacrifice recorded in 1 Samuel 13?

I find that if I can get myself into the right state of mind, the right attitude, waiting is no longer the trial it might otherwise be.

I was once at Nairobi airport and my luggage had got mislaid, and I had an onward flight I needed to catch, and it initially seemed that the staff were not in the slightest bit interested or concerned.

I watched as another white male traveller got it all wrong, out of a mixture of entitlement, fear, and impatience. The staff remained scrupulously polite but unresponsive, their faces a mask of defence and detachment.

Fear can be contagious, and he was very fearful, so they had to defend themselves, but he read it as indifference, and his manner provoked inaction rather than inducing meaningful help.

Watching his behaviour and the staff reaction, I resigned myself to the worst possibility, i.e. that I would miss my connecting flight, and the moment I made that decision, I was free.

And then a wonderful thing happened. I found myself asking the staff about how it was for them, how often this happened, did they ever get thanked... and in no time at all there was a different atmosphere, some real interaction, some joking and chit chat, and lo and behold, in due course - and indeed in due time, my missing luggage was found.

You can imagine my delight! What was also marvellous was the pleasure of the helpful staff at my happiness. My gratitude increased their satisfaction, while their fulfilment increased my joy.

Now this anecdote is not about the wonder of retrieval, although that was very good news indeed!

I suspect it was a special grace for me, because I regret to inform you that on other subsequent occasions, I have been horribly bested by frustration and impatience!

The point of the story is about my state of being, an acceptance of a situation that was beyond my control, and which generated/received a peace that was neither fatalism, nor despair, but a graceful acceptance.

We all aspire to the calm cultivation we need to produce this fruit of patience, and LouLou has been majoring on the brokenness many of us have to experience to acquire the gift and grace of patience, and thence produce the fruit.

And being an artist she has dwelt upon the beauty of it all.

Gratitude is part of the topsoil needed for this plant. How glad I was that there were people I could seek out and ask for help!

And we have more than a human to approach...

How pleased I was to find a watching eye and a listening ear! And we have a never sleeping Love that always watches, always hears, and is always aware.

Yet underneath this topsoil, and the necessary habit of thankfulness, there lies deeper nourishment.

Julian of Norwich wrote what many see as absurd and challenging words,
"All shall be well, all shall be well,
And all manner of things shall be well."

Such nonsense to say to anyone in pain, tortured by abuse, wounded in war, separated from family and friends. It even seems absurd when dealing with the lesser but normal exigencies we all face as we get older.

Try this for a different rendition,

"All will be well, all *will* be well,
And all manner of things will be well."

It will be well, because Christ wills it to be well.

"Your will be done, on earth as in heaven"

It will be well despite what we see and hear, and the things we often think and say.

For Christ says,

"I know my own and my own know me...
No one will snatch them out of my hand.
... And remember, I am with you always...."

So we are not waiting for bad news. We await the kingdom, and it is already in us.



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And so we wait. We wait on the LORD. We wait by, we wait through, we wait in, we wait until; we wait for.

"Be strong and let your heart take courage,
All you who wait for the LORD."