

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 9th August 2020

A visitor remarked to me recently that what he needed as he negotiated the Whitletts Roundabout, wasn't so much a knowledge of the Highway Code, but a degree in Quantum Physics. It is a bit of a nightmare if you are not used to it!

Every time I use that particular roundabout, I know that I have to concentrate that bit harder on my driving, no matter the direction in which I am heading, and once or twice, I have narrowly escaped a contretemps with a car in the wrong lane (not me, of course!).

Concentration is the name of the game!

This past week, many of our young people received those long awaited Grades in their important examinations, in a year when the whole exam system was topsy turvy because of Covid 19, and I hope that all their fears for their future have been allayed, and the hours of concentration that they devoted to their Prelims, will have given them good results. I can recall very vividly the amount of concentration that went into my O Levels, my Highers and my degree examinations at University. I have never worked so hard in all my life!

A Minister friend of mine who is retiring at the end of this year had been learning to play Bridge before Lockdown, for all those spare hours he is going to have in a few months' time. His wife is already a very keen Bridge player and he has decided to take it up so that he can join her. He was telling me that he thought that to play Bridge well, you just had to keep track of the cards, and know what had been played and what was still to be played. That was going to be difficult enough – the coming and going of 52 playing cards! But he found out that in the games he had been playing, there is often non-stop conversation during the playing of the hand. Gossip, house repair projects, holidays, articles in The Scotsman (he lives in Edinburgh!), family news, physical ailments – all are discussed during the game and it was often difficult to give full attention. And you don't know whether someone has just trumped clubs or sloughed a heart on the last trick!

Concentration is the name of the game!

Whether it is following one of Mary Berry's recipes; swinging the club to hit that wee white ball; or working out a difficult mathematical equation – we can be so easily distracted; our attention drifts so readily.

That is precisely what happened to St Peter that night when the disciples were crossing Lake Galilee in their boat, and one of those sudden violent storms arose for which it is renowned, and those hardy men, some of them fishermen who knew that stretch of water like the back of their hands, were petrified. The waves hammering against the vessel, the winds howling, the imminent threat of drowning in the watery deep.

And St Matthew writes, "...and Jesus came to them."

They saw the figure in the midst of the storm; at first they thought it was a ghost.

And Jesus spoke, "Don't be afraid; take courage; it's Me"

And when Peter heard His voice, he shouted, "Lord, if it's You, tell me to come out to You on the water!"

And Jesus told him to come.

And one of the amazing truths of this wonderful story is NOT that Jesus was walking on the water.

It is that Peter, reckless Peter, stepped over the gun whale and out of the boat and walked towards His Lord, fully focussed on Him.

Then Peter started looking at his surroundings and the crashing waves and the howling gales and he took his eyes off Jesus and was frightened and began to sink.

"Lord, save me!" he shouted.

The minute he lost concentration on Jesus, the moment he felt the force of the storm around him, he began to go under.

It happens to us as well.

The fear that Peter felt is probably not unfamiliar to you. Maybe you haven't attempted to walk on water lately, but you know what fear feels like.

You have felt the fear of having a sick child or a helpless parent.

You have felt the fear of not knowing if your job is secure.

You have felt the fear of wondering if a relationship would last.

You have felt the fear of being in a new situation.

You have felt the fear of imminent loss.

You have felt the fear of grave illness.

I've been there too.

We live in a universe that is very frightening at times.

And this incident from the Gospels assures us that the minute we stop looking at Jesus; the moment we focus our thoughts on all the negativity and the storm clouds and the threatening waves; that time when we stop concentrating on the power of Jesus, then we sink, as the hymn says, "in life's alarms".

With our eyes fixed on Jesus, our thoughts concentrated on Him and His power, we can weather the tempest. He will grasp our hand; He will not fail even a faltering, fretted faith.

And sometimes God sends another person who is there for you in your darkness.

And often you feel His strength, His peace, His courage filling you when you are at your lowest – in the promises of the Scriptures, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, in the words of a hymn being sung in Church; sitting quietly as you receive the Bread and Wine from the Holy Table.

When we find ourselves on a surface that won't support us, we have a choice – we can sink alone, or we can reach out.

The choice is pretty clear.

“Lord, save me!” cried Peter in his fear.

And His prayer was answered.

Have faith, and grab a hand.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken

Locum Minister.