

*“LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in the whole earth!
You have set your glory in the heavens. You have made sure that children and
infants praise you. Their praise is a wall that stops the talk of your enemies.
I think about the heavens. I think about what your fingers have created. I think about
the moon and stars that you have set in place. What are human beings that you think
about them? What is a son of man that you take care of him? You have made them
a little lower than the angels. You placed on them a crown of glory and honour.
You made human beings rule over everything your hands created. You put
everything under their control. They rule over all flocks and herds and over the wild
animals. They rule over the birds in the sky and over the fish in the ocean. They rule
over everything that swims in the oceans.
LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in the whole earth!” Psalm 8 NIRV*

Dear Friends,

I have just been for a 30 minute walk down to Burley Weir and back. I needed a break from the computer. I needed to get away from the tasks of leading the Circuit – plan making, risk assessments, zoom meetings, pastoral issues, preparations for Advent and Christmas, liaising with ecumenical colleagues and other community leaders, preparing agendas, writing papers and proposals, submitting online statistics, enabling others to fulfil their ministries – whether lay or ordained.

In truth, I felt overwhelmed! I felt exhausted – mentally, physically, emotionally. Maybe it is my continuing health problems, maybe it is the stresses of ministry and leadership in a time of Covid restrictions, maybe it is spending too much time at the computer. I'm sure I am not the only one, either in Ministry or in wider society, who is struggling with such pressures at the moment.

Thankfully, I have my quarter days this week. These are three days every three months gifted by the Church to those in Ordained Ministry for the purposes of rest, recuperation, renewal, and retreat. They provide an opportunity to stop, to get off the treadmill, to regain perspective. My walk this afternoon was a much needed, mini version. And as I walked, I began to notice things.

I noticed that now the leaves are falling from the trees it is easier to hear, see and identify the birds along the way. There were all the usual suspects: blue tits, great tits, sparrows, blackbirds, wood pigeons and rooks. But it was easier to see some birds that are more difficult to spot when the trees are in leaf. There were also, robins, chaffinches, wrens, a song thrush, a very friendly bullfinch, and even a momentary glimpse of a Jay. As is its nature, as soon as I stopped to look at it, it got spooked and

flew off. In the old manse we used to see a Jay once or twice a year in October or November but this was the first one I have seen in five years.

I noticed too, the immense variety of berries, often on bare branches, that don't just provide nourishment for the birds but also an array of colours in the dullness of a damp, dark autumn day.

I noticed squirrels jumping around in piles of leaves and that led me to reflect on how there is also a purpose to the leaves falling from the trees, other than enabling me to better identify the birds. As the leaves, and then the berries and nuts fall to the ground, so they provide food for other animals and insects. The leaves rot down into mulch which then releases precious nutrients into the ground. The seeds and nuts get buried and in time will spring up in new growth. I wonder if there continue to be aspects of our church life that we need to allow to fall to the ground and die in order to provide the space – the nutrients – for something new to spring up?

All this from a short walk. All this from a different view and a fresh perspective. *“Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in the whole earth!”*

I am reminded of two important issues for the person who would follow Jesus. First, as Dallas Willard once wrote, *“The greatest enemy of spiritual formation in our day is hurry-sickness. If you want to discern God’s voice you must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”*

Second, the number one priority for each and every one of us is simply this: to contemplate the majesty and mystery of God; to look for God’s presence and action in the world around us; to discern where God is calling us to join in; and then – and only then – to act on what we discern.

I have lost count of the times since March when I have heard people say, or said myself, that maybe God is using this season to re-shape the Church, to give us a fresh insight into how God is calling us to partner in God’s mission to our communities, to consider the new thing that God might be doing. But then all too often, I, and perhaps we, simply get sucked back into the old routines and ways of working and self-inflicted pressures.

I am challenging myself to use my quarter days to step off the treadmill, to make space to contemplate the majesty and mystery of God and to see where that might lead me. I want to challenge you to do the same thing. Not just for three days this week but throughout the season of Advent as we seek to prepare our hearts once more for the coming of the Lord. If you are able, try to take a walk each day, or simply to stand in the garden for a few minutes and contemplate the majesty and mystery of God before your very eyes.

As I walked this afternoon, I was reminded of one more thing, the words of a poem that you may be familiar with. It is called “Leisure,” by W. H. Davies. Allow me to offer it to you as a gift for your own contemplation.

*What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?—
No time to stand beneath the boughs,
And stare as long as sheep and cows:
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night:
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance:
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began?
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.*

Every Blessing,

Rev Tim

Notice

I am delighted to be able to share some good news with you all. The Circuit Meeting has agreed a proposal to offer a 0.4fte appointment to Rev Dr Martyn Atkins to join the ministry team at Otley for a period initially through to June 2021.

Many of you will know, or know of Martyn. Martyn grew up in Otley and has held significant roles within the life of the Methodist Church nationally. He has served as Principal of Cliff College, as General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Britain and as both President and Secretary of the Methodist Conference. Until earlier in the year Martyn served as Superintendent Minister of Methodist Central Hall Westminster.

Martyn has confirmed that he is delighted to be able to work alongside us and will take up this role at the start of December. Martyn will add significant experience and expertise to our Ministry Team and will focus on:

- Preaching appointments and pastoral work
- Developing a missional lay appointment project using the trust fund that Otley hold in conjunction with Cliff College
- Helping to develop clarity on what sort of profile we would create for a presbyter to work alongside Otley, Bramhope, and Pool from Sept 2022
- Working with the Property & Finance Team and Church Council at Otley to create a clear and realistic property development plan
- Offering a mentoring role to Rev Tim as a relatively new Superintendent
- Facilitating staff development days, possibly once a quarter
- Co-ordinating the work of the ministry team at Otley, working alongside Deacon Jenny Parnell and Rev Alistair Newton, and freeing up Rev Tim Perkins to focus on superintendency and ministry at Burley and Menston