

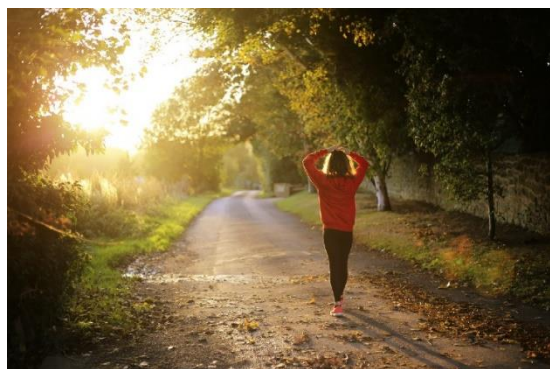
Sunday Thought

21st August 2022 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Jeremiah 1: 4 - 10
Psalm 71: 1 - 6
Hebrews 112: 18 - 29
Luke 13: 10 - 17

A Whole Day of Faith



I love the story of Jeremiah's call to 'work for God'. Not least because it is reminiscent of my own – 'Me! I'm too young! I couldn't be a preacher, teacher, leader!' The Lord had other ideas. The readings for this week together suggested a more personal *Thought*. I must say at the outset, please don't think my life of faith has been exceptional. It has not because there are as many different

patterns of life as there are believers to run them. However, these scriptures suggested *Life in a Day* as it is for followers of Jesus.

Jeremiah reminds us of the early years – the bleary-eyed morning faith of bedtime prayers, school scripture lessons and Bible stories, and possibly young peoples' activities with church or chapel. It is the time of realising that *God is about!* Already some are beginning to see that God is involved with us and has 'a plan for my life.' I was conscious of the call to personal ministry. Though not wholly sure what it was all about, I was aware he wanted me to follow, step by step, like Jeremiah. It had started even from before we were born! Yet, from the beginning, everyone is 'called and chosen' for a part in the divine plan. It is only later in the day when looking back and 'pulling the threads' a picture emerges. The size of the part is not significant.

That early part of the day is all a bit misty, until an afternoon pause. When the heat is high and sultry clouds hang low there comes a realisation – all that faith and church stuff was just the more formal way of religion. The writer of the letter to Hebrews compares it to the beginnings of worship in the Sinai desert when God was understood in terms of mountain grandeur, storms and still evolving, volcanic landscapes. Then worship was offered in fear of Almighty God with his awesome, demanding commandments and judgements. But now, because of Jesus, we have come to see that the heart of it all is a very different experience, involving a new covenant relationship with the Father in which every believer has a living and personal relationship with him, knowing Jesus as brother, friend and God, Saviour, and Lord. It may even be later in the day. The sun has broken through!

The Gospel reading takes us into the fullness of the *Life Day* when we are involved with Jesus in a whole galaxy of life's joys and pains, crosses and resurrections, getting involved with the church and the world. This section of the *Life Day* is illustrated in the record of Jesus at a local synagogue. He noticed a woman outside. She was probably barred from the worship because of her condition. It was bending her double after eighteen years of painful twisted suffering. The synagogue folk simply diagnosed it as 'devil's work'. With the wonderful compassion of the Father, Jesus took notice and called her to a total healing. How often we may have we passed on the street a stranger, obviously in pain, trouble or other need and helplessly, said, '*a prayer in passing*' for them! One day we shall meet all those 'helped' people. No compassion prayer is left unanswered. We shall meet those too from within our places of worship who challenged Jesus and to whom he may well have called out, '*Hypocrites. You're so intent on decorative buildings and people-made rules for worship and membership, you've lost the grace of compassionate prayer and loving inclusion.*' Of course, we will be prepared for the personal issues he will want to point out to us too.

I must go on to the evening of the faith-journey. I found that in the psalm which is '*a prayer in older age.*' In fact, it was the original inspiration for this *Sunday Thought!!* It is like a glorious sunset-ending to the day and even more glorious in the light of the word from Hebrews about the certainty of heaven – sharing in the glory of the New Jerusalem. It is an older person's prayer of faith, developed through the whole *Life Day*, that the best is still to come when we enter that, maybe at first, suffocating experience of angels everywhere, to join the praise of the first and second born - 'good people made perfect'.

I claim no personal achievement in this day of faith but continually offer another of those compassionate Jesus-prayers that we may all share the glory of this *Life- Day* of faith we have spent with our Lord.

A prayer in later years [based on Psalm 71]

Lord, the years are passing at the speed you planned.
There have been times when I wished I could stop
and hold the moment for ever
But now I think forward to coping with emerging
problems, weakness, and fears

BUT through the experiences of the Life- Day
with you I have proved
You will not let me be defeated,
You will be like a strong, protective cloud of grace around me.
I will continue to hope in you
Because this often-wavering faith you have given me, piece by piece,
Will not fail me now.
I will go on praising you, all the way to heaven.

