

Sit Down



In my imagining the office could change from visit to visit. On this occasion I thought of the chair. It was comfortable but not easy, hallowed but welcoming. My experience of sitting there was far from unique. It would be a well-worn seat, perhaps sagging a little from use by more weighty saints who occasionally share it with all who come to this office at all times of the day. I see some of them perched tensely on the edge, some relaxed, well back and embedded in the cushion, and all aware of his generous invitation – *Sit down!* Millions of people who come to this moment at all times of the day have entered and sat down at the director's invitation.

I looked to the Bible window. The Bible is a library of His Office encounters. I saw Abraham in his upright solid wood chair outside his tent gazing up at the stars, pondering over the promise of God which would determine the destiny of world history. Then there was Moses, sitting shoe-less on the ground in front of a bush, incandescent with divine glory, and Isaiah sitting awhile before slipping on to his knees, hiding his face before a vision of angels while hearing the voice of God. The images slipped by quickly and I saw disciples of Jesus sitting in a becalmed boat, staring open-mouthed at the mill-pond waters around them, as unruffled as the one who had calmed them. I saw the apostle Paul sitting, blinded on a bed in Straight Street, Damascus waiting fearfully for divine instruction. Yes, this is a hallowed seat whatever form it takes. The pictures passed, leaving me with a sense that my place should really be on a footstall rather than in the chair. I had witnessed some of the most critical moments in the world's history when men and women had sat in

the Office chair. Each had come individually to the same place of meeting with God, in Jesus, the way he could speak and show himself to them. I realised again how unique are our encounters with him and how much we would miss if we had a stereotyped picture of him. I understood what Erasmus meant when he said that we would see less of Christ if we saw him with our eyes.

Occupancy of the chair across the centuries will have been accompanied by various happenings from blinding light to thunderous voice. Eternity mingles with time in the stillness of God's presence, the unknowable enters our minds, the unapproachable approaches us when in Jesus he leaves the office door open and says, *Come and sit down!*

The chair has been a life-changing place. There have been few times in His Office which I would describe as dramatically altering the course of my life and yet in some small way each meeting nudges me either in a different direction or a little further in the way he has already led me. I cannot help feeling sad about the times I have not felt the need to go to His Office, times when prayer has been neglected and I have missed those firm compassionate pushes into his will.

On the other hand, life itself has often propelled us towards His Office to hammer on the door that is always open. Life crises have thrust us through the door and into a seat, forcing us to meet him whom we assumed has no concern for our anger and our tears. Just as the meetings have created life-changing moments, so life-changing moments have created new encounters. How often I have seen that when I have come, storming in, despairing of his love - even of his interest in me and my affairs. Those have been the times when he has directed me to the chair and waited until I calmed down. Then I learned more of him, more about trusting and loving him, more about my own selfish demands and closed mind.

The Christian story is crammed with illustrations of the saints who have journeyed to holiness because of the critical, questioning moments which have caused them to lean against the open Office door. I saw the face of Janet in the memory window. I can see the radiance in her eyes which met me as I entered her room. She was so different. A little while before this she had realised the truth behind her doctor's

kindly implications. The days left to her were few. The first of those days were filled with fears, regrets, questions, doubts - and prayers - prayers of a different kind. Her situation was causing her to call on God with a new desperation. On that particular morning, though, she was changed. Eagerly, she told me of how she had sat up in bed with a strange sensation of presence and how the far corner of the room seemed full of light. Into her mind came the words of a familiar hymn - *Sometimes the Lord surprise the Christian while he sings (or while she sits). It is the Lord, who rises with healing in his wings ...* Janet was an elderly lady and consequently her remission was brief, but her last months were a time of peace and hope, happiness and assurance.

Christian life is a continual discovery of Christ, often in the most unexpected places and situations and we do well to follow Tolstoy's advice to live seeking God because there can be no life without him. To accept that is to realise that our hardships, our critical moments touched with despair and doubt, can be our allies rather than our enemies. They can be the very things which take us back to him to discover that he is with us, caring, providing, encouraging us to trust him. There may be no answers to our questions, no miraculous healing of our wounds but always a welcome and the assurance that we are not alone. Coming to the Office there is always an invitation to sit down. So, I sit in the well-worn chair - sometimes seeking it - sometimes dragged to it - but ever conscious of all that has been experienced by those others who have welcomed his *Sit down!*