

A year ago this Friday we moved from Coworth Road to Hampshire, and this is an image of the last lorry to leave. I am slightly embarrassed to admit that the superb removal men had already filled another truck, the same size as that one to the brim, together with a luton and transit van....and that it is having had a good clear out prior to packing up. What a lot of stuff we acquire and gather and carry around with us; it is human nature to want more, but as Paul describes us in his letter to the Colossians, we are God's chosen people, and, as such, we already have very much more than enough, but that is something that is not always easy to recognise.

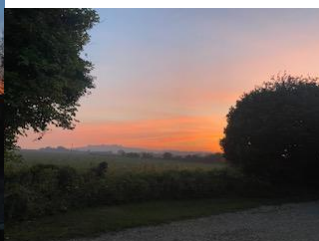
Faith is often quite rightly described as a journey and one that lasts a lifetime; We are taught to seek God, to strive to comprehend his will; Matthew tells us to ask and it will be given, knock and the door will be opened, and that effort to understand and walk in His ways is, of course, entirely right. But I wonder if a pause on that journey might occasionally be worthwhile; Even God the creator, rested on the seventh day, and in doing so gave us the Sabbath. I am certainly not suggesting we pause and do nothing, I am simply saying that in striving to move closer to God, we can sometimes lose sight of the fact that he has been right next to us all along.

In our gospel reading Christ declares that not one sparrow is forgotten by our heavenly Father, and furthermore, that all the hairs on our head are numbered – with beautifully simple imagery Christ provides the most comforting assurance that the minutiae of our existence is known to God, and is in his mighty hands. It brings to mind Psalm 139, one of Katherine's favourite verses, which she kindly pointed out to me - 'You know when I sit and when I rise, you perceive my thoughts from afar.' In grander terms, this reflects the imagery on the stain glass window behind me, that He is the Alpha and the Omega, and all things in between. Quiet, deep and genuine reflection and acceptance of that, allows us to heed the command towards the end of our gospel reading – 'Don't be afraid'. '

Like many people I am passionate about, and find great solace in, the natural world around us, God's own creation; so the imagery of the humble sparrow in our gospel reading really appeals to me. From our new house, we are very lucky to have a lovely view to the West, which means we have been treated to some superb sunsets, and have taken to marking these out of ten. This was a seven, this an eight, and this is a nine – we are yet to award a ten.



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Taking the time to pause and appreciate the setting sun is nothing new but on one occasion my daughter quietly observed that every sunset is completely unique - it has never looked like that before and will never look like that again. Her comment revealed a whole new level of appreciation for something that I already adored.

In the same way, pausing to consider...and reconsider God's gifts of Love, wisdom, grace and forgiveness may bring us to a fresh realisation and therefore deeper understanding – to do what Paul says 'to let the message of Christ dwell in you richly'. That message is, of course, given to us through scripture; my talk this morning is based on just nine verses, but think about all there is to consider and sustain us, in just those nine verses; nine out of the 31,102 verses in the bible. Stopping to really dwell on just a few of Christ's words is as the great visionary William Blake put it, 'to see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in wild flower, to hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and Eternity in an hour.'

Sometimes a pause on our spiritual journey can be forced upon us; we can be easily distracted, and thrown of course by the inevitable trials of life. In such circumstances I am horribly guilty of parking faith and trying sort it out by myself. At such times, it is easy to despair, particularly when there appears to be no end in sight.

The novelist and poet Thomas Hardy explores just such a situation in his poem The Darkling Thrush, which brings us back rather neatly to ornithology. The poem is set in the depths of a particularly harsh winter when, as Hardy puts it, 'The ancient pulse of germ and birth/ was shrunken hard and dry/ and every spirit upon the earth/ seemed fervourless as I.' But just as this despondency threatens to overwhelm him, a thrush sings its song, a moment which Hardy describes as 'Had chosen thus to fling his soul upon the growing gloom.' This simple act is so powerful, unexpected and completely at odds to the prevailing atmosphere that it leads him to conclude that there must be '...some blessed hope. whereof of he knew/ and I was unaware.'

Although it may sometimes seem far off, we are aware of a blessed hope – the hope provided by the eternal promises of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So safe in this knowledge, and clothed, as Paul tell us, 'with compassion, kindness' and crucially to the point I have been trying to make, with ...'humility, gentleness and patience' I pray that all our journeys of faith continue according to God's plan; but that we may also just occasionally pause, pause to consider all that we already have and having done so, may we obey the command in verse 15...'be thankful'. Thankful that through faith, we will find God in all things, if we just take the time to look carefully enough; and quoting the Psalmist one final time to '...be still, and Know that He is God.' Amen

Michael Grist, 31/8/25