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## **Back to school**

**About a month ago I wrote in my introduction to this email that I was feeling a bit back-to-school-ish; now we've finally hit that point in the summer where I'm not alone in that feeling! Many moons ago I qualified as a youth worker and spent around fifteen years working with young people in churches and community settings, primarily in suburban and urban contexts but I also did a couple of years voluntary youth work in a tiny village in south Leicestershire.**

I'll be honest, so much has changed about how young people 'do life' in the ten years since I was last employed as a youth worker that my previous experience and academic qualifications certainly wouldn't get me shortlisted for a church-based youth work job these days.

But, fundamentally, young people themselves haven't changed. They're still figuring out what it means to be 'them', to understand the world in which they find themselves, to manage the expectations of others and their own sense of possibility, in exactly the same way each of us did, whether that was ten or twenty years ago, or sixty or seventy years ago.

Imagine having to negotiate those existential challenges while all around you things change in ways you cannot control, living through an experience that is likely to reshape your immediate future in ways you can't really begin to imagine. Not since the Second World War – when my grandparents' lives and expectations were turned on their heads – has a generation of young people faced the rug being pulled from under them in the way we see playing out in front of us everyday on the news at the moment.

Please pray for all of those children and young people who are returning to or starting school, college or university at the moment: for the fear and apprehension many will be feeling, for the sense of possibility that others may have. Pray for parents, teachers and youth workers, that they are equipped to meet the needs of this generation of children and young people at this time of crisis.

If you have a school in your community, pray for it and consider how you might bless it over the coming weeks. How about writing a card of encouragement to the staff, or emailing the head to let them know you're praying for their community? How might you support and encourage children and young people that you know, whether or not they're part of your church community?

Know that we continue to keep you in our thoughts and prayers.

Go well!

*Louise, on behalf of all at the Arthur Rank Centre*

# The glory, majesty and wonder of God

## Bible Reading: Psalm 8 (NSRV)

O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honour.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

## Reflection

If you were to ask a lot of people who do not go to church regularly about the Psalms, generally they might not know too much about them. If you asked them about the 23rd Psalm, they might tell you that it is the one with the Good Shepherd in it! It is a familiar Psalm at weddings, funerals, or baptisms. If you were to ask people about Psalms in general, they may describe them as boring and irrelevant. It is my experience that churchgoer or not, generally the Psalms are not on the top of someone's favourites list. Just how much are they missing?

Psalm 8 is very firmly on 'my favourites' list! This psalm, like many others, was written by David. Being a Rural Officer and Agricultural Chaplain, I realise that it has so much to say about creation, the natural world and the glory, majesty, wonder and sheer awesome might of God. This psalm is, without a doubt,

an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who he is and what he has done, and relating us and our world to him.

The range of thought here is amazing and brings us back to ask, 'what is humankind?' The psalm states that God has put people 'a little lower than the angels [NIV] and crowned them with glory and honour'. Out of this whole array, from stars to sea creatures, only we can look at this scene with insight. God bestows us with such honour, and yet what do we do? So often we travel around this world with our eyes closed, taking it all for granted, not languishing in such beauty! At our worst we try our level best to destroy it by being either greedy or wilfully neglectful. We ruin the ozone layer, create global warming and even at a very local level, often down a country lane, we get rid of our consumerist lifestyle by fly-tipping our rubbish. We do these things when all God wants is to lavish his love on us! It is worth noting that once lockdown occurred and very few vehicles were on the road, and industrial activity was reduced, the levels of CO2 were diminished.

Of course, the farming community, whether religious or not, have an extraordinarily strong spirituality, based on creation and the natural world. They eat, sleep, breathe and live with it every day. During the lockdown particularly and throughout the whole of this current pandemic, I have been fortunate enough to 'stargaze', to wonder on creation and our natural world. Because my work has enabled me to do that, I could get out into the wilder parts of Dorset and wonder at the whole of creation. It renewed my faith and made me realise that I too have taken both God and his creation for granted. Yet in love he sought me out and brought me back to appreciate the wonder of it all. All this because of a psalm or two!

## **Prayer**

Bearing in mind my comments on the misuse of God's creation, I came across this prayer from *Seasonal Worship from the Countryside* by the Staffordshire Seven, which is a Declaration of Forgiveness:

May God the Creator forgive our misusing of his creative work.

May God the Son take up onto his cross the sufferings of our land,  
our animals, our families and ourselves.

May God the Holy Spirit give us the strength and power to  
overcome our troubles, weaknesses, and temptations.

May God the Holy Trinity forgive us all our sins. Amen.

## **Response**

Perhaps as now many are finally coming out of shielding and have often had little opportunity to recently see creation in all its glory, then you could encourage them to go out into the wilds and soak up the natural world.

Equally, there are those who are very frightened to come out of lockdown. Pray for them as the days go by. Maybe you could find some ways of encouraging them to come out and begin to live something like

normal lives again. Depending on each circumstance, this may need approaching with a great deal of love and sensitivity.

You may know someone who would love to prayerfully explore the Psalms with you, particularly Psalms 8, 23 and 121 ('I lift up my eyes to the mountains...').

*Revd Richard Kirlew, Chair of the Agricultural Chaplains Association and Churches Together in England Churches Rural Group*