

First lines really matter: Psalm 19

Today's TFTD is from Linda.

This year I've decided to leave our Christmas tree up and decorated until the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary or Candlemas as it is also known. In medieval England Christmas celebrations continued for a full 40 days after the 25th December, with Candlemas marking the official end of the Christmas season on the 2nd February. Though it has to be said medieval Christmas started on Christmas Day and not the middle of August as is often the case nowadays.

Still, it's been a tough year so anything we can do to lift the spirits and spread a little cheer has to be encouraged especially as we're now faced with 'Lockdown Lite.' Hopefully, ten months on we all have our 'go-to' coping mechanisms in place for those long dark days that seem never ending. Mine aren't overly ambitious, every day I look forward to my circular walk and my commune with nature and if I crave some variety, I do the same circular walk in the opposite direction – it works, it looks entirely different.

My other 'go-to' has been reading. It has been suggested that you can tell a good book by its opening lines, perhaps you will recognize some of these:

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times."

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

"Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that."

"Once the queen's head is severed, he walks away."

The author Stephen King revealed that he spends months, even years, writing opening sentences, attributing the success of the entire book to these first few words, he said: *"a really good first line can do so much to establish that crucial sense of voice - it's the first thing that acquaints you, that makes you eager, that starts to enlist you for the long haul. So there's incredible power in it, when you say, come in here. You want to know about this. And someone begins to listen."* First lines really matter – they set the scene and draw us in.

*"The heavens are telling the glory of
God;*

firmament proclaims his handiwork" Psalm 19.1

And the

The opening line from Psalm 19, and who hasn't been amazed by some aspect of nature at one time or another? We are awe-struck by size and complexity of God's

creation. These things exhibit God's power. Someone wrote that "*Nature doesn't whisper - it shouts. And it shouts continually - This is God's handiwork.*"

² *Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.*

³ *There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;*

⁴ *yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

"*Day to day pours forth speech.*" The Hebrew word for 'pours forth' can also be interpreted as, "to bubble up and overflow," literally "to gush forth" in an uncontrolled manner. God wasn't stingy in creation. He created colours and sounds and wonders everywhere you look. God's fingerprints are all over creation. But it's important to remember that the Heavens may declare God's handiwork, but creation isn't the same as the Creator and Psalm 19 carefully maintains this distinction.

This Psalm is attributed to David, who was neither a priest or a prophet. He didn't do 'religious work' in the usual sense. Rather, he was a shepherd, a warrior, a musician, a poet, and most famously, a king. Nevertheless, he sought to please the Lord with his words and thoughts, not just in his private prayers, but in every aspect of life. What makes this Psalm stand out for me is not just its great opening line but it finishes as good as it starts. "*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*" (19.14)

This short verse is often used by preachers as they step into a pulpit – either aloud or silently whispered, but I think it deserves to be liberated from the pulpit and taken out into the world. How might our lives be different if we began praying [Psalm 19:14](#) in our day-to-day situations? What difference might it make if, before engaging in conversation, you prayed, "*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer*"? How might praying this way transform our language and actions, how might it affect the way we conduct ourselves during lockdown, how might our lives be enriched if we were to pray and pray often:

*"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you, O
LORD"*

at work and at

home, a
t church and at rest,
with friends and with strangers,
in company and in solitude,
in all places and situations,
may my words and my
heart, be
acceptable to
you, O
LORD, my God. *Amen*
Every blessing, Linda

“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” (Tale of Two Cities; Charles Dickens)

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” (Pride & Prejudice; Jane Austen)

“Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that.” (A Christmas Carol; Charles Dickens)

“Once the queen’s head is severed, he walks away.”

(The Mirror & the Light; Hilary Mantel)