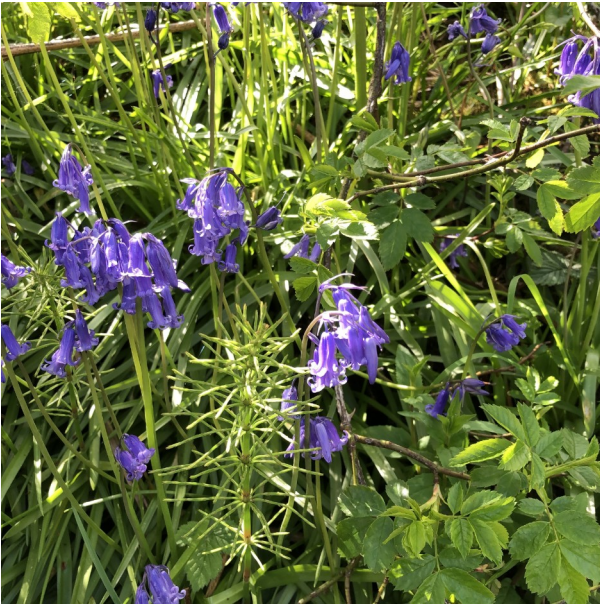


Keep the faith and do the little things: 1 Peter 5



*“Brothers and sisters, be joyful,
Keep the faith and do the little things
That you saw and heard from me.
And I shall walk the way our fathers went,
Fare thee well,” said David,
“And never more shall we meet again.”*

We were reminded on Sunday of the “little things” that St David exhorted his people to hold on to in his last sermon, just before his death. There’s a valedictory feel about this last chapter of 1 Peter too — and like many of these early Christian letters, it focuses on the “little things” which are really big things, but folded up and slipped into a pocket-sized package that’s easy to remember and carry around with you.

When I was a child reading my Scripture Union notes, we were encouraged to read a bit of the Bible every day and choose a “password” to memorize all through the day. Knowing you could be challenged any time to “give the password” gave it a bit of an edge — but it did encourage learning Bible verses! Old-fashioned, I know — but sometimes the old ones are the best

So what are the “little things” that 1 Peter wants his readers to remember? Wise words on leadership, first: *Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those who are in your charge, but be examples to the flock.* “Leadership” is

a hot topic — books offering the secrets of successful leadership fill a large section of any airport bookstore. These words are specially poignant for anyone considering the awesome privilege of leadership in the church. (Do remember Anna in your prayers as she prepares for her ordination on July 4th, and all those who are discerning their vocation and preparing for ordination in the next few weeks — not forgetting those who are preparing for licensing as lay ministers.)

- *Not by constraint but by consent:* Sheep have to be coaxed and persuaded. Shepherds who try to bully the flock or impose their own ideas by force just cause panic and chaos.
- *Not to make a profit but with eagerness.* You can't give the flock your proper attention if you're looking out all the time for "What do I get out of this?"
- *Not domineering but setting an example.* It's no good lecturing a flock of sheep on the advantages of your chosen path, you have to show them the way by going that way yourself.



The key is the image of the shepherd taking care of the flock — and knowing that whatever our role, we are only under-shepherds, entrusted with caring for the flock by the Chief Shepherd. The real shepherd is the Good Shepherd, Jesus himself (John 10.11; John 21.15-17; Luke 15.3-7).

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in good time. A pocket-sized summary of the message of the whole letter — in words that echo Paul's famous hymn about Jesus in Philippians 2.3-11: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. It's about letting our minds and our whole way of being be shaped by Jesus' way of being: Let the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus ...

Being "humble" doesn't mean being "ever so 'umble" like Uriah Heep: it comes from the Latin *humilis*, which means "close to the ground" (think humus!),

keeping your feet on the ground, not being too grand to get your fingernails grubby when there's gardening to be done. People who are genuinely humble aren't constantly drawing attention to themselves — they're too busy seeing what needs to be done and getting on with it.



And that goes with a kind of cheerful self-forgetfulness that has absolute confidence in God: *Cast all your anxieties on God, because he cares about you.* When I worked in Sheffield, there was a marvellous lift called a Paternoster in our sixties tower block. It was a continuous chain of open compartments circling up and down the building — I just stepped on at the bottom and stepped off on floor 11. Often I realized (like the people in the picture) I was still clutching my heavy briefcase all the way up, when I didn't need to — the Paternoster was carrying both it and me, so I could lay my burden down and let the lift take the strain. It's God's job to care for you — so why waste energy by doing all the worrying yourself? Too often we say our prayers and then get back to full-time worrying — instead of letting our heavenly Paternoster take the strain.

Discipline yourselves, keep alert. As we start to get back into something a bit more like “normal” life (if we can remember what it was like!), it'll be hard to rid ourselves of the wariness, the alertness (the hand-washing!) of this past Covid year. Maybe that's not entirely a bad thing. The unexpected death of a friend, or a near-miss car accident, can have the same effect. We thought we had all the time in the world to repair or enjoy our friendships: that we had a limitless future in which to make good our lives, reassess our priorities, take time out to enjoy God's world and seek him properly. Many people have commented that the effect of lockdown has been to concentrate our minds on living thankfully in God's *now*. We've learnt new habits of prayer — and care — that are worth hanging on to as we work out what to take with us into the post-pandemic world.

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you

to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore you, stablish, strengthen, settle you: to him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

A good prayer to finish with! (and let's not forget the many parts of the world where the suffering is still going on). Tomorrow is Ascension Day, and that takes us into the season of Pentecost. TFTD will be following a short series of seasonal readings for *Thy Kingdom Come*, a global prayer initiative launched by Archbishop Justin a few years back which has taken off around the world. More about that on Friday. And we'll also be reflecting on what we have learned from this year of TFTD, as we prepare to take a break over the summer months. We'd love to hear from you what you have learned, and what's the best way we can continue to help each other to "keep the faith and do the little things".



God bless,
Loveday

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