

## WEY VALLEY – WEEKLY CIRCUIT LETTER April 2023

Barrie Tabraham

### *Independence Day?*

Dear friends,

11 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. <sup>2</sup>The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. <sup>3</sup>Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. <sup>4</sup>I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. <sup>8</sup>How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?

12 But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.



As I write this, my main feelings are ones of overwhelming thankfulness that I've been discharged super-early after surgery for knee replacement – so the folk at Merrow will have to forgive me if they've heard some of these thoughts before. A few years ago, as a result of cancer and heart problems, I had a protracted spell in **Epsom Hospital**, and an incident occurred which reminded me (to my shame, I must confess), of one of the most basic truths of the Christian faith.



One Sunday morning, one of the nurses asked if I'd like a **bath**, since I'd not had a proper one since my operation, and I was wondering whether I'd been picked up on their radar! So I said, "*That would be wonderful*" – and it was. I was wheeled into the bathroom (I couldn't walk that far yet, even with a frame), manoeuvred on to a hoist, which swung me across and down into the deep, warm water. Absolute bliss. To crown it all, the little grey-haired Irish nurse said, "*I'll come back in 10 minutes and wash your hair if you like*" – which was just the nicest thing that had happened to me since I'd been admitted – and the tears flowed.

I had never been so aware of feelings of dependency before, and this set me thinking. Christians believe that we have a personal relationship with God, based ultimately upon love. It rests on the basis of our complete and **utter dependence** upon the one who '*gave all worlds that are, and all that are to be*', to quote George Studdert-Kennedy. When we stand before the God who calls the stars by name but who also counts every hair on our heads, then we acknowledge that we owe everything – everything we possess and everything we are – to him. We cannot even take a breath, but it is God's gift to us.

Now, far from making us feel helpless or down-hearted, this should give us a sense of glorious freedom. It opens our hearts and minds to the wonders of God's grace; it means that if we're too ill or tired or depressed to pray, then ultimately it doesn't matter, because *God's* love is constant and unchanging – and that is hugely liberating!

However, this incident with the bath led me to a second thought. Throughout my 5 weeks stay in hospital, the doctors and nurses were working hard to make me better, so that I could be discharged – or, to put it another way, to become independent. They would not let me go home, for example,

until I could prove to the physiotherapist that I could walk up two flights of stairs, albeit with a stick. All their efforts were directed at making me **independent**.

Now, any **parent** will tell you that, ultimately, that's precisely what parents do. Our job is, in a sense, to make ourselves redundant! We help our children to become independent, so that they will be able to survive in the world using their own resources, and develop their own gifts as God intended. But we also find that this notion speaks to us about our relationship with God, just as powerfully as the thoughts I shared about dependence.



One of the books which helped shaped my theology years ago was one by the Scottish theologian, **John MacQuarrie**, whose writing is not easy but repays careful study. MacQuarrie speaks about God as the one who “**lets-be**” – not in the sense that He cannot be bothered with us, but precisely because the opposite is true. In his *Principles of Christian Theology*, he writes: ‘By “letting-be” I mean something much more positive and active, as enabling to be, empowering to be . . . self-giving, the grace of being which pours itself out in love.’ (pp. 113-4)

**And this is the glorious paradox** of our relationship with God, for it rests on our complete dependence upon one who longs for and encourages us to become liberated from sin, and thus truly ourselves. It's like parents encouraging their children to take their first steps, because our Lord says to us (in those lovely words of Hosea above) ‘hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.’

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**A Prayer:** Gracious God, help us to cast all our cares on you, for you indeed care for us, more than we can ever know. As we grow as your daughters and sons, teach us your ways, help us to follow in the way of Jesus, and grow more and more into his image – and the people you long for us to be. **Amen.**



*Barrie Tabraham*

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