

## Thought for the Day – 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Last weekend, I should have been camping in the grounds of Boughton House, enjoying my ‘annual spiritual top-up’ that is Greenbelt. Almost every year since 2007, I have experienced a mixture of talks and discussions, art, music, performance, worship and fellowship that inspires and challenges me in terms of my faith as well as justice and environmental issues within our world.

This year, the festival itself did not happen and, although there were opportunities to engage in some virtual material, I chose to go off camping for the weekend rather than sit in front of my computer.

However, I did take some time to revisit and reflect on some of the books that I have bought over the past few years, including:

- Black Sheep and Prodigals by Dave Tomlinson
- Everyday God – The Spirit of the Ordinary by Paula Gooder
- Accidental Saints – Finding God in all the Wrong People by Nadia Bolz-Weber
- Disappointment, Doubt and other Spiritual Gifts by Mark Yaconelli

I began to see a theme that linked all of these books – God is at work often where we least expect it – in our everyday, ordinary lives; in people who may be troubled or different; in our disappointments and times of darkness and suffering. In particular, I began to think about ‘unsung heroes’ – people I have met that quietly go about helping others, working within the church but often very happy to be in the background rather than in the ‘limelight’.

According to Christopher Reeve (the former Superman actor), ‘A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.’

There are many ‘heroes’ in the Bible that we read about time and again: Noah, Moses, Abraham, Joseph, David, Peter, Paul, to name but a few, but how much attention do we pay to the ‘unsung heroes’? Often, they can go unnoticed.

This reminded me of the story of Tabitha in Acts 9:

**36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. 37 At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.” 39 So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.**

I admit that, for a long time, I was completely unaware of this story. It was easy to miss yet here was a woman who was a disciple of Jesus, helping and caring for others, making clothes for those who couldn't afford them, and was clearly important enough to those around her that they sought help and healing from Peter.

Do we know people who are 'unsung heroes' within our own communities? Do we open our eyes to God's work in the ordinary or unexpected? How can we be 'unsung heroes' ourselves?

I was particularly struck by the following words from Paula Gooder in her book 'Everyday God':

*'We are notoriously bad at celebrating unsung heroes. Of course we are, if we weren't they wouldn't be 'unsung', but there is great virtue in taking time to appreciate the unsung heroes of our lives of faith, whether in the Bible or in our lives today. We need to become better at thinking and honouring those who get little if any notice, whose patient, quiet service keeps the show on the road, who are as far from celebrities as you can get but who, nevertheless, are vital to God's mission in the world.*

*We do need to be better at celebrating such people but at the same time we also need to recognise that part of the essence of the kingdom of God is to be 'unsung'. The problem with our celebrity culture, which is as vibrant within the church as outside of it, is that it so often forgets that our calling as Christians is to be servants of all. This does not mean that we are called to be well-known, well-respected, often-thanked servants of all, but that we take on the role of a servant in all its aspects. One of these aspects is to go unnoticed. The best servants are those whose presence is barely discernible as they go about their business; the worst are those who advertise not only their presence but the trouble you are putting them to by sighing deeply and dragging their feet.*

*Part of the point of God's calling to each one of us is that we are called to be God's unsung heroes and we will know we are succeeding, not when people begin to notice us but when they begin to notice God.'*

Let us pray:

Lord God, of the ordinary and extraordinary,

We praise you for all those who are called to do your work in our world.

Help us to find your Spirit within our everyday lives, the people we meet and the challenges we face.

May we become your 'unsung heroes' to enable others to notice you rather than ourselves.

Amen