

Recently Peter and I ventured north of the border to visit family. On our return, neighbours asked if we'd had a good holiday. Yes, we had a wonderful time. Holiday it was not. We were on the go from 7 in the morning until 7.00 at night. Having been solitary and perhaps rather too sedentary for weeks, the noisy whirlwind of grandchildren was a shock to the system. Constant movement; splashing in the paddling pool; shooting or saving goals; pushing the swings, trying to keep up with an enthusiastic cyclist; preventing eager gardeners from uprooting the growing veggies; eating pretend meals; all this accompanied by constant chatter. Sophie who is three is at the circular 'why' stage. Jamie, almost 6, wants to explain how every bit of his lego creation is assembled or why parts of his latest book could be scary but does have a very happy ending. Yes we were exhausted. Not least because like all children they can be naughty and tested the boundaries with aging grandparents. We saw both children attempt and succeed in leading each other into mischief. Tears and tantrums when programmes were switched off and they were made to sit on the naughty step. But what bliss when it all subsided! There was a period after bathtime, when we all sank down on the sofa for 'huggles'. Misdemeanours forgotten. All content with a very full day.

This is the picture painted in this modern version of a psalm of King David (131)

2 I am humbled and quieted in your presence.
Like a contented child who rests on its mother's lap,^(a)
I'm your resting child and my soul is content in you.
3 O people of God,^(a) your time has come to quietly trust,
waiting upon the Lord now and forever.'

In the previous psalm (130), coupled with this, David has begged God's forgiveness for all he has done wrong. In God's grace, he finds a quiet place to rest, to take stock and to reaffirm his trust and commitment to God's plans for him. As children of God, it is good to take time to reflect in humility on all he has done for us in Jesus; to offer each day to him all that we have done or failed to do; our successes and our disappointments, our sins, and simply to rest in his loving embrace, If in these 'unprecedented' times, we've made more time for God, trusting in him to lead us. How can we make sure we continue this practice as we move forward?

According to original Hebrew, the child in the psalm who rest on its mother's lap is 'weaned'. Not like the three premature babies saved by a nurse in Beirut the other week- they were quite vulnerable and totally dependent on adults for their sustenance and protection, oblivious to the chaos in the streets around them. The word in the psalm refers to a child in the same stages as our grandchildren, having a measure of independence and an ability to explore the world, tasting its delights, getting into mischief, leading each other astray, wearing each other out. On a walk in a country park, the three year old raced down hill at a great pace. On route to the playground there was an uphill stretch through a fir forest. The weather had changed. We were walking into the wind and the rain. Sophie stopped in her tracks. Peter and Jamie were too far ahead to be seen. 'We're lost!' she declared and disappeared into the trees. Thankfully we weren't. 'I want a huggle,' she said. Sophie had exhausted herself. She wanted to be picked up and carried. For the few minutes I was able to do so, she clung to me, burying her head in my shoulder until she felt recharged.

For some of us, the last few months have given us a breathing space from busy routines and ongoing commitments, granting us opportunity to recharge our spiritual lives. For others though it has been simply exhausting, rather like our trip up north. People have been juggling work at home or in the community, home-schooling and minding children, care for neighbours and relatives, getting to grips with technology and exercise regimes, limited resources and struggling to implement practically rules for protection against the virus. Like Sophie, they are in need of a pick-me-up, time to re-charge, to 'rest content' in the Lord. We pray that as life opens up we can find new ways to provide much-needed respite for those worn down by multi-tasking.

We pray too that those returning to their work-places, to the school run, to endless meetings and all the 'busyness' of almost normal life might be able to create a more healthy balance between rest and activity. May they still find time each day to rest contented in God's presence like a contented child in its mother's embrace.

Today let us give thanks for Andrew and Fiona , for the refreshment of a good holiday shared. We give thanks too for many within our churches who are working tirelessly to hold us together in God's love .

A final prayer are the words of hymn by Andrew Pratt based on this Psalm 131.

Safe as any child, God keeps us
firmly held, secure and warm.
Calm and quiet each soul is rested,
sure within the fiercest storm.

Like a mother, God consoles us,
heals our hurt, dispels concern;
watches as we grow in knowledge,
stands beside us as we learn.

Here in humble prayer and waiting,
we have known God in this place;
so we move towards the future,
satisfied within God's grace.

Kate Horrix for 1.09. 20