

Leavening Methodist Church

Thought for Sunday, 23rd August (Steve Langton)

Producing these weekly thoughts has been a rewarding experience for me. The discipline of having to come up with suitable words each week, whether written myself or edited from other's contributions, has been good. However, this week has been more difficult; on Monday evening I learnt of the death by suicide of the 18 year old son of a friend of ours. We were already feeling a bit low due to problems in our own family over the last couple of months, and so this further bad news left me quite jangled.

Perhaps because of this, after reading through the week's scripture readings my mind was a complete blank. Inspiration came from reading Tom Wright's commentary on the gospel reading [Matthew 16: 13-20](#). I have always been confused as to why there was this secrecy about Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Messiah. Wright explains that public identification of Jesus as the Messiah would inevitably have brought massive attention on him, leading to conflict with the authorities. This is of course what eventually happened in Jerusalem, but the time was not yet right, hence Jesus '*ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah*' (v20). An instruction that must have seemed odd to the disciples at the time, made sense in terms of God's plan.

Mulling over these thoughts in the middle of the night, the phrase 'God moves in a mysterious way' came into my head. This phrase comes from a poem by William Cowper in 1773, which was adapted to form a hymn with the help of his friend John Newton. We listened to Graham Kendrick's version of this hymn during our service two weeks ago. Cowper himself wrote these words around the time that he was struggling with a depressive illness which led him to attempt suicide. Cowper's despair led him to pen those words that have helped so many:

*¹ God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform;
he plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.
² Come all you saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.
³ Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face.
⁴ His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.
⁵ Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.*

And this led me back to some words Louise wrote last week, albeit in a slightly different context: 'we are challenged to accept that our interpretation of events which may have a terrible impact on us may not be the whole picture. This can be very hard and may not be possible for months or even years after the event...'

So as we face the challenges that life throws our way, let us strive to accept God's will, and have faith that God's plan will unfold in due course. In some situations this acceptance may be relatively easy. In others, particularly those involving the loss (by death or otherwise) of a loved one, the process of coming to terms with events may take far longer.

Loving God, as we see the apparently senseless struggles that life brings, help us to have faith in you and remember that you have a plan. We pray particularly for those known to us who struggle with depression, and for those who are facing the despair that comes from bereavement. We pray that they may feel your comfort, and that the clouds they dread may indeed break into blessings. Praise be to God. Amen