

WYLDE GREEN URC
Thoughts for the Week beginning 28th June 2020
This week's thoughts are written by Adrian Miles
Based on miscellaneous Bible texts and:

'A Personal Experience in Sutton Park'

Although writers of 'Thoughts for the Week' have set lectionary readings to help them with their weekly reflections, I always say to them, 'If you want to write about something else, don't feel constrained by the lectionary readings and indeed some do just that and who will forget Alastair's epic cycling adventure of a few weeks ago. Today is my turn to tell you about my recent hair-raising adventure in Sutton Park.

For those of you who live a bit farther afield, Sutton Park is the most wonderful area of green space consisting of 2,400 acres of heathland, woods and lakes. It is truly a wonderful place, 'Thank You Lord!' It is located just 6 miles from Birmingham city centre and is one of the largest urban parks in Europe. Although busy around the car parks and lakes it does not take long to find a bit of peace and quiet, and seemingly isolated from the rest of the world. There is even a herd of Exmoor ponies roaming free.

Last Saturday, like many others, getting used to a bit of freedom from the lifting of Coronavirus restrictions, Sue and I decided to go for a walk just before lunch accompanied by our border collie Abi and one of our sons, Andrew, with his wife Gemma and their two young children Erica and Faye. The weather was fine with the slight threat of the occasional shower.

For those of you who know Sutton Park, we set off from one of the car parks where enthusiasts fly their small powered model planes and wandered down the main path to Banners Gate and then headed out across the moorland area.

It wasn't long before the sound of background traffic noise began to fade and we seemed to be the only walkers for miles around. Our dog Abi insisted on leading the way, as border collie dogs do, closely followed by Faye and Erica who loved climbing the trees and wading through the odd puddle which were getting slightly larger and deeper as we went along.

The first point of decision came when the path forked. Sue and I confidently said, 'It's this way'. However when we shortly reached the next fork in the path Sue said it's this way and I said, 'No it's this way.' I was reminded of Isaiah 30:21 *'Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."* In this particular case the only voices were Sue and mine, both uncertain as to which we to go, so we went to the right.

Stretching out confidently I took the lead, but I should have heeded Proverbs 11:14: *'Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances.'* I didn't have good direction and the path became wetter and wetter, muddier and muddier.

'Not far now, I shouted confidently as I powered forward with Abi and the all of a sudden, **'SQUELCH'**. My left leg sank into the mud, rapidly passing my ankle and wrapping its sticky clinging tendrils around my calf. Quick as a flash I stretched out my right leg, trying to get a grip on dry land and then **'SQUELCH'**, my right leg too sank up to my calf. I was stuck firm and fast. My dog thought it was very amusing, but I had other thoughts on my mind. (Psalm 69 *'Save me, O God! The water is up to my neck; I am sinking in deep mud, and there is no solid ground.'*)



No matter how hard I tried I could not move. Every time I tried to lift my foot, I felt the relentless drag of the mud, trying to rip off my boots. I had visions of walking 2 miles in bare feet! ‘Help!’ (Psalm 144:7: *‘Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters’*)

The rest of my family were obviously concerned judging by the level of laughter that was going on behind me. I assumed it was them because I couldn’t turn around. At this stage my dog clearly decided she had had enough and returned the rest of my family leaving me to sink a little further. However, help was at hand. Andrew, who with the rest of his family had up until this point throughout the coronavirus crisis carefully socially distanced himself from Sue and myself, threw caution to the wind and grabbed my hands and began to pull me out. All he succeeded in doing was to dislodge my boots a little more before I toppled forward into the mud. The mud had now reached the tops of my thighs.

There was only one thing for it, Andrew had to form a social bubble with me. He stepped into my personal space and I received my first ‘cuddle in a bubble’ as he put his arms around me and eventually pulled me clear! Just like a sumo wrestler and my boots even came with me! Well done Andrew!

Sue, Gemma, Faye, Erica and my dog Abi had seen enough and went the long way back to the car park. Andrew and I made our own separate way back, getting some very strange looks from passers-by, most in pristine condition, as these two creatures from the swamp squelched past them.

Well it all seems very humorous now and in hindsight it was, but I am glad I was not alone. I have since learnt that a young mother and her child got stuck in a similar position last week and the Fire Brigade were called out to rescue them. I am glad Andrew was there to rescue me!

The biblical analogies are there for all to see. How many times in our lives have we got stuck in ‘mud or deep waters’? The Bible tells us that in our everyday lives if we get caught up in difficulties, God will be there to rescue us. Here are some Bible readings that remind us of this:

Ezekiel 34:11-12

“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

Psalm 91:14-15

“Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honour him.

Matthew 14:28-31**Jesus Walks on the Water**

²⁸ *“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”*

²⁹ *“Come,” he said.*

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

³⁰ *But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”*

³¹ *Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.*

I will always remember Andrew with his arms around me as he lifted me from the mud. It’s not the kind of experience you forget in a hurry and that’s sort of how I imagine Jesus with me in times of trouble, His arms firmly around me - never any question of Him letting me go – firmly in His grasp.

Prayer for the Week

Dear Father thank You for the beauty of green spaces like Sutton Park. We pray that areas like this are always available for everyone to exercise and have fun in and to enjoy your wonderful natural world. Thank You for family and friends and we pray that we may all be able to enjoy relationships with others that are steadfast and loving. Above all Lord thank You that You hold us in the palm of Your hand, guiding us, rescuing us and keeping us safe. We thank You in the name of Jesus Amen