

News from Liz

July 2020



Dear All,

Well I set myself a goal of getting this newsletter out before the end of May. You can see how that went! I last wrote in January, just before I was about to leave for Chile - it seems like a bygone age, doesn't it? I think news was just filtering through of a virus outbreak in China, but no hint of what was about to befall us. I arrived back in the UK at the beginning of March - in the nick of time really, so am profoundly grateful to have got home safely on my scheduled flight, and to have got myself installed again in my little flat for the duration of lockdown.

So of course, first of all, I hope you are keeping well and surviving these strange times. I'm aware that there is such a massive spectrum of individual experiences as we each navigate what this means for us. As I connect with different people (all of course now via the internet or phone) who are in different parts of the world, and different stages of life, it remains a privilege to share in their lives and listen to their hearts.

The question of 'where is God in this' is always important in our lives, whatever circumstances we are in - pandemic or not. It's the question that is at the heart of spiritual direction, which is what a lot of my work is about these days. I know the question can easily sound a bit hackneyed, but in essence I still love it because it focusses my attention beyond how I'm feeling or what I'm experiencing and opens me up to a different kind of awareness. The God who is always in communication with me is wanting to give himself to me in a particular way right now, and as I learn to tune into that, I can receive the good thing that the God of grace always has for me - be it comfort, wisdom, direction, strength, healing, compassion, endurance ...

On a personal level, I have sensed an invitation to welcome again extra quiet, still space into my life during this time. Bike rides have been a bit of a life-line and the quiet roads have been a joy. I also - as many have commented - have felt particularly conscious of the beauty of bird song - something that I know is always there especially in Spring but it seems to penetrate my being in a lovely way, and remind me that I'm not alone.

Chile 2020

Every year I feel like my time in South America is more worthwhile - and that was certainly the case again this time.

For many of the people that we are working with, the Christian life has been so much about outward conformity to 'good Christian behaviour and works/ministry' - trying to live up to standards and expectations, based firmly in the conviction that one *should* be able to live up to it. Therefore when people find they can't live up to it, a highly developed 'try harder' mentality kicks in, which does away with any notion of rest. Then when people still can't live up to what they believe is demanded of them, they encounter increasing guilt and condemnation and shame (which always says, 'there is something wrong with me') so suffering deepens. Often therefore the people who come to us are in some degree of burn-out. Their energy has been focussed on outward behaviour with relatively no invitation to inner life - of, for example, being in touch with their emotions, paying attention to their own heart and listening to what drives their behaviour. It's all about producing the right results. We have had the privilege of unfolding the good news of a gospel of rest, where participants can embrace at a deeper level what Christ has done for them - the righteousness that is already theirs and the profoundly different journey that then results.



The Father's House was the title of our two week retreat, and it was wonderful to watch what God did in the lives of the participants, as we focussed on the different ways that the Father wants to bring us home to a deeper knowledge of his love and our place of belonging. We went back again to the story of the Prodigal Son - I'm always amazed at how this story never stops yielding insights. I particularly enjoyed my friend, Gerd unpacking these verses:

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'"

The son has been embraced with joy by the Father - and then in the middle of this embrace, he begins a recitation of his unworthiness. I find that fascinating and I reflect that I often do the same. God is busy loving me and I pull out my list of all the things that I believe make me unworthy of his love and resist his embrace. The Father's response to the son in the story is to up the ante - he clothes his son in dignity and kills the fatted calf for him. The son's recitation of his unworthiness is swept aside.

During the retreat, we decided that we would do some symbolic acting out of this story. We suggested that the participants identify for themselves all the things that they felt disqualified them from being received home by God. We sat in a circle and invited them one by one to step into the middle and be embraced by a team member representing the Father, then to read out their list of 'disqualifiers' - "I don't pray enough," "I'm too selfish," "I don't have enough self-discipline," etc, etc. Then we ripped the list up and celebrated each individual for the unique and infinitely precious person that they are. It was a significant time for all of us.

Life in Haywards Heath

Never have I done so little travelling! Yet in the midst of many restrictions and cancelations, there have also been some new opportunities. Now everything is happening on-line, and Zoom is the new norm, then it doesn't really matter where in the world you are. So for example, I have been able to teach for a Saturday morning on a course in Argentina, which would never normally have been possible. I've also been contacted by people who suddenly have had more time on their hands and so have reached out for some coaching. Other spiritual direction work has simply transferred to the virtual world, which has its advantages and disadvantages, as we are all discovering. It looks like our plans for next year's training in South America will also move on line, as international travel is still so uncertain. The invitation to put our trust in God is there like never before, isn't it?



As lockdown eased, I was able to spend some time with Mum up in Morecambe, and it was soooo therapeutic to enjoy (and work in!) her garden. I got lots of fences painted, and weeding done - and digging - this is some of what I managed to unearth from one of her borders!



Mum thought this was a good photo of us both - taken by my brother, when we visited him on his allotment in Kendal. For those who prefer to see faces, below is a selfie taken in Sedbergh, where Mum grew up. We had a stunning day out there, managing to avoid the crowds.



So, that's a round up of my news. Once again, as always, thank you so much for reading, and for your interest, prayers and support.

With much love,

Liz xx