

Thought for the Day: 2–8 November 2020

by Charles Ledsam

[MONDAY]

All Souls Day

Today we remember the departed, particularly those who have died in the past year. Anyone losing a loved one this year has missed the opportunity to gather together to say their farewells and reflect and celebrate that special person's life. Grieving has been put 'on hold' for so many of us.



St Paul's Cathedral has created an online book of remembrance to commemorate those who have died as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK. Many bereaved families and friends of those who have died have not had the chance to attend funerals because of the restrictions on gatherings and travel. The Online Book, *Remember Me*, offers a memorial, which in time will become a physical presence in the Cathedral's North Transept. It is open to anyone in the UK, and the person who has

died can be of any religious faith or none, and does not need to be a British Citizen. So far over 6,000 tributes have been submitted. To submit a tribute for a loved one, we are invited to visit www.rememberme2020.uk

This may be a good day to telephone one of your friends or family members to talk about a loved one who is no longer with us. It may also be good therapy for you if you're feeling bereaved.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all those who are brought low;
that they may find comfort,
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love.
In Christ our Lord, Amen
(Church of England prayer)*

[TUESDAY]

Jeremiah 29:11 says: "For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you..."

I left school without much of a career plan, as I was not at all academic. After two years in the Wine Trade, I joined a firm of Lloyd's insurance brokers. It was the day of the first moon landing, when Neil Armstrong took his 'One small step for mankind'. It was my first small step into City life!

My role changed several times during my working career, especially after the firm was taken over by a financial services group. Work pressures built at the same time as our family responsibilities grew. One major



change was being appointed HR Director. On the outside I seemed successful, but at what price? Were these the 'plans to prosper me'?

I learnt several useful lessons there: (a) good administration goes un-noticed, (b) that all people matter whatever they do, (c) that I should never assume anything, and (d) discretion and diligence are essential. The moment things went wrong was when you were noticed.

When I retired, I always felt that my whole career was about luck and being in the right place at the right time. Looking back, it was part of God's plan but I had not really noticed.

*Gracious and loving God,
we can get scared and nervous about the future.
But we know that the future is in Your hands.
Be with us as we go through this day.
Help us to make good decisions,
and be with us each step of the way.*

[WEDNESDAY]

Jeremiah 29:11 continues: "Plans ... not to harm you (us)" (says the Lord)

When I was about twenty, I was diagnosed with epilepsy. Even today I do not find it easy to talk about this, despite it being twenty years since I had my last fit.

Over the years, like many people, our family has gone through some challenging times. Various health and other family crises have occurred. At one stage, Debbie was seriously ill and

hospitalised in Cambridge for some six weeks. This was an especially tough time for us. At work I 'preached' the importance of 'work/life balance', but I clearly did not follow that advice very well myself at the time (these days, I find both meditation and compline helpful to maintain that balance).



Back then, we survived and just about coped and, often knowing that other people held us in their prayers, we indeed felt that we had 'God on our side'. Over the years, I have realised that our plans are very often not

His plans and that God's plans are not to harm us but to support us in our lives.

A prayer by Cardinal Newman:

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

[THURSDAY]

Jeremiah 29:11 continues: "Plans to give you hope and a future"

As I approached the last few years of my full-time working life, I began to think about the future. What would I do? What

should I do? What could I do? What did I want to do? One thing was to run my first London Marathon (for St Clare Hospice). It was quite an experience!

During my years working in HR, I supported many colleagues who were facing both work and personal difficulties, so I decided to set up a small coaching business to help such people.

I had also become increasingly interested and fascinated in the City of London, where I had worked for so many years. I had been pre-



occupied with my job, avoiding the chewing gum on the ground (or worse!) but never looking up at the buildings, churches and monuments which surrounded me. These included statues of well-known people of their time, such as Samuel Pepys, John Newton, Rev Chad Varah and Dick Whittington (yes, he existed!). Such people led fascinating lives, which I have been able to explore further through walks in the City (which is sometimes the best way to hold sensitive conversations with my clients).

*"One the object of our journey,
one the faith which never tires,
one the earnest looking forward,
one the hope which God inspires"*

(words from the hymn 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow',
by Sabine Baring-Gould)

[FRIDAY]

Jeremiah 29:12: "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you"

In 1978, the St Andrew's Church Forward Planning Group created an imaginative plan for development of the church building. Proposals included (a) a central altar for worship, (b) more intimate areas for individual and small group worship, (c)



making the space in the church more adaptable, (d) a kitchen and toilet, and (e) a church office to handle administration. Later on came the plans to refurbish the church hall. What were the priorities and how would we raise the money?

The priority was prayer. Over the years, various groups were set up to try to discern what God wanted us to do. Much valued by the wider community, the Centre has become a much-

used space for health and well-being. It has been a real answer to prayer.

The need for me to pray personally was essential a few weeks ago when I was feeling really helpless and lost. I had taken on some business work to which I should have said "No"! After almost three weeks, with poor sleep and feeling anxious, I grew pretty desperate and uncertain as to how I could meet the deadline I had been set.

God did listen and, on the crucial final day before my deadline, I received four messages of encouragement within twelve hours, beginning with "You've entered my thoughts, so thought I would check in..." Three positive phone messages followed! Things began to fall into place and I achieved my deadline - just!

Taizé: O Lord hear our prayer... come and listen to me

[SATURDAY]

Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

It was one February evening in the early 1990s when Helen Shapiro came to Hertford Theatre for a Gospel evening. Helen had been a 60's pop singer, whose classics included 'Walking back to Happiness' and 'Fever'. She spoke inspiringly (interspersed with some great singing) about her early life, being brought up in a Jewish home, her rise to stardom from the age of fourteen and, through curiosity and conversation, eventually becoming a Messianic Jew in 1987.

Afterwards there was an opportunity to buy CD's, signed by Helen. When it was my turn to speak to her, she asked me if I was a Christian. "Well, I like to think I am," I replied. She looked at me and said "Are you a Christian?". I continued to hesitate and she looked straight at me with her big brown eyes and said: "You can't sit on the fence for the rest of your life."

That was a very powerful moment for me. I walked home on that crispy frosty night with the sky filled with shining stars. When I arrived home, I sat 'pondering those words'. I had a strong feeling that a voice said to me "Here am I! Trust me. I

will take care of you.” And that is the moment I gave my life to Christ.

My Christian Life then became much more energised, including organising men’s breakfasts with Christian speakers who challenged us to look at our faith and ask ourselves, “Are we sitting on the fence?”.



Seek ye first the kingdom of God... seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you.

[SUNDAY]

Remembrance Sunday

The St Andrew’s Church War Memorial was erected in about 1923 to commemorate those who had died or were killed in the First World War. There are sixty names carved into the stone, each representing a family who lived in the Hertford area or had a connection with the town. A few years ago some work was carried out to research the history and stories behind those whose names appear on the Memorial.

Amongst the names shown are 2nd Lieutenant Sydney Geering of the London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers), who died of his wounds as a prisoner of war at Touracourt in France on 3 May 1918, aged 27. He married in 1915 and was the oldest of six children. One sister, Dorothy, married Charles Hudson, a local dentist. Another sister, Meggie, married Captain WE Johns (author of the ‘Biggles’ stories).

Trooper Arthur Wackett (Grenadier Guards, Household Cavalry) was killed at Flanders very early in the War on 31 October 1914. Arthur's name is commemorated on a panel on the Menin Gate, which we visited in 2015 to commemorate the centenary of my own great uncle's death. Arthur's niece, Gladys, attended St Andrew's for many years and at one stage oversaw the church Sunday School at its peak with a hundred children!

Captain Julian Grenfell (Household Cavalry) was the eldest son of Lord and Lady Desborough, who owned Panshanger House and park. He and his brother, Gerald, both died in 1915. Buried in Calais, Julian was also a talented poet. His poem 'Into Battle' was published by The Times the day after his death.

*At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
we will remember them.*

