

# Thought for the day: 21 – 27 June 2021

## by Katie Seaton

### Monday 21st

I sit opposite my son on a train. He has an InterCity 125 ('High Speed Train') facemask on, and is wearing a t-shirt with the iconic London Underground 'roundel' and the famous phrase 'Mind The Gap'. Sensing a theme yet?!



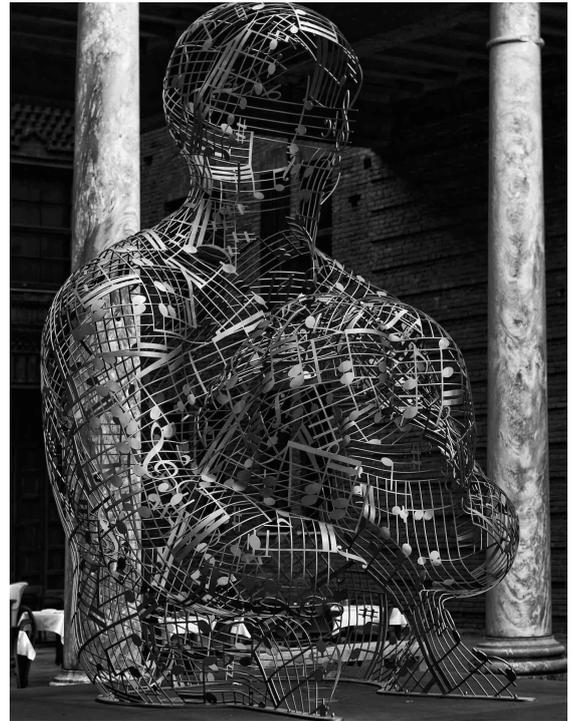
Famous phrases can be like favourite foods, can't they? The first time I tried grilled sardines on toast or crispbread with cherry tomatoes, it was a brand new and wonderful

sensation. Then I ate it every day for lunch for two years and the familiarity robbed it of the wonder and, eventually, it started to make me feel sick.

Not having grown up in the church, I had a lovely time discovering the context of so many famous biblical phrases and hearing them fresh when I began to explore the faith. 'There's nothing new under the sun.' 'Some fell on stony ground.' 'The thorn in my side.' How do we guard against the fading power that comes with familiarity here?

## Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup>

A good friend of mine, who is very into metal music, has a problem. He has always loved the music of the band *Iced Earth* and used to deeply admire their songwriter and guitarist, Jon Schaffer. But Schaffer was one of the people who attacked the US Capitol building in January. How can my friend, who abhors the ideology and actions of that group, reconcile the part the music played in his own life with what he knows now about its creator?



I wanted to try to help, so I read the Wikipedia article on Schaffer to look for ways to understand the roots of his behaviour, to at least have some understanding of why he ended up on that path. I saw that he went to a very controlling, perhaps abusive, religious school, which put him in the habit of seeking routes to rebellion.

I also speculated that sometimes being a star might be an easy route to fallacy. There is all that fizzling restlessness of the creative mind, but who or what is there to tell you to stop looking for that which appears to confirm the daydreams originating from your own personal damage, and to connect with the real world? Maybe that unchecked fallacy was interacting

unfortunately, in Schaffer's case, with a kind of mass psychosis? Who knows!

In cases of disappointment such as this, it does seem important to try to understand people and their actions. Usually I try to avoid any kind of conceit that I might understand what it's like to be someone else, but in these cases it's made more necessary.

Well, anyway, I hope my friend can take what he needs from the music itself for his own, in the end, despite the fallen idol. Despite it all, in my opinion, the music remains part of this universe, part of humanity replying to the ultimate conversation opener that is Creation.

### **Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup>**

I came across the following quote in Christian space online: *'Learn to be OK with not being invited, included or considered'*.



I do not understand this at all, especially in the context of a faith that commands us to love our

neighbours as ourselves. Why is exclusion a thing we're meant to be OK with? How on earth can we be?

Perhaps the idea might be that we're strongest if we can lean on our own emotional resources and our relationship (if we can easily identify such a thing) with God. There have certainly been moments of profound relief and... unclenching... in my spiritual life when I remember that I don't have to pretend to be better than I am for God.

Or perhaps it's saying that to expect to be included every time is putting oneself at the centre of the universe and burdening others with an unreasonable expectation to do the work to make you relevant?

Right now, I really don't think I can agree, though. We're social animals. We are *supposed* to understand ourselves - and, indeed, God - through our connections to others. (We are literally told to think of God as a father.) We are supposed to develop the resilience and self-reliance that this phrase seems to advocate *through* our relationships with our family as children, and later our partners and friends.

As [this](#) article points out, in Maslow's famous hierarchy of human needs, belonging needs are first in the priority list as soon as we've made sure we're not going to die soon, essentially. And there are excellent reasons for this. Surely, it is only in a place and time such as here and now that such a 'quote' could ever hold any weight; a place and time in which individuals are expected to depend on material security to the

extent that also depending on each other stops being so much the norm.

Maybe a more useful thing to learn to be 'OK' with is the knowledge that we can never depend entirely upon ourselves - and that's OK, because we were never meant to. And maybe remembering that will also help us to love - and include - others.

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/why-feeling-left-out-can-feel-so-painful-and-7-healthy-ways-to-cope#1>

## **Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>**

Do you remember the day you realised that it's when we don't know the answer that we're usually forced to grow?

My memory of that moment involves a reading comprehension exercise, and the passage we were given contained the famous quote from the parable about separating the sheep from the goats.



'What,' the question asked, 'do you think is meant by that?'

Well, I had a non-religious upbringing. I did not have a **clue!** I remember slightly panicking, because I was accustomed to being Good At English and always knowing the answer. I remember scouring my brain for something I could say about sheep and goats, of which I knew, really, the very minimum required for an 11-year-old:

Sheep: fluffy.

Goats: kinda sleek.

Sheep: wool.

Goats: tasty cheese.

Sheep: laid back. Hang out in crowds.

Goats: altogether a little prancier. More inclined to do their own thing.

Sheep: fields. And hills! Especially in Wales.

Goats: also fields, but also... Alps? Maybe? (I'd read *Heidi*).

Sheep: occasionally a bit slow on the uptake - in the nicest possible way, of course...

Goats: faintly associated with sinister things? Maybe?

I put all this together and came up with an answer about independence of mind. I was a contra-suggestible child. It was obvious from the phrasing that we were meant to favour the sheep, for some inexplicable reason. So my answer strongly advocated for goats who could think for themselves, and I went into some depth on the subject while floundering for the answer that I didn't have.

But I was downcast, because I liked pleasing this teacher, and I felt he would not be impressed with my not knowing the 'right' answer. I seem to remember vaguely deciding I was a failure and dreading getting my book back.

The next day, the teacher specifically took me aside and told me what a great answer I'd written; how hard I'd thought about it and what interesting ideas it contained.

People of faith are often challenged to give answers. Many of the questions are unanswerable, of course. But, sometimes, to attempt to discover the answer, and indeed to discover what the question itself could mean, can lead to new thoughts. And what I learned that day - about the value of sometimes **not** knowing the answer - stays with me to the present.

## **Friday 25<sup>th</sup>**

Following yesterday's adventure with sheep and goats, I actually realised that I *still* don't understand why Jesus used sheep to indicate 'good' and goats 'not-so-much'. I've googled it; here's the BBC Bitesize answer (which seems to be aimed at GCSE students):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zgqjgdm/revisio n/5>

So, yep, they don't know, either! But I guess Jesus was simply extending his existing metaphors that had likened his followers to sheep, so it had by then become a shorthand? I'm no theologian, so do correct me there, if need be!

I'm going to come back to my Wednesday thought, though, about whether we should expect to be OK with not being included.

One interpretation of the whole 'Sheep = Good' thing might be that sheep make their righteousness more certain by sticking together. In fact, Jesus specifically talks about God focussing on the lost sheep, not the ones that remain in the herd. The point of that parable was to examine the reaction of God, I think I understand: love that brings the stray back, rather than anger that the stray strayed in the first place.



But what of the 99? What if their togetherness, their interdependence, was what made it possible to leave them safely for a while? And, of course, this is why rejection hurts so badly. Why not being included awakens deep, primal, negative feelings in us all.

## **Saturday 26<sup>th</sup>**

My husband has accidentally booked us the most enormous hotel room in Newport! We think that if we put the upstairs and downstairs of our house side by side, the surface area would be slightly less than this room. I have to write quickly here, because it's an hour and fifteen minutes 'till check out and I've yet to sit in three of the possible chairs, one side of the balcony remains virtually un-looked-over and I've only had a bath so far – I want to make sure I avail myself of all the marbly goodness in the shower, too! Peter is watching with a mixture of respect and amusement my determination to so thoroughly utilise our inadvertent luxury.

The reason we are here is to say goodbye to Peter's mum, who died recently. With her, his last remaining tie to Newport is gone now, and his home town has no legitimate present-day connection to his life anymore. So he thought he'd splash out (though not expecting it to be this much!) one last time.

The places where we have been leave an imprint on us, I think. A place that you feel belongs to you, somehow, and you belong to it, is a timeless thing. When I return to such places, they seem to ask me where I have been, why I let the reality we know together drift for so long.

I reach the part of the thought where convention dictates I pull it all together and talk about God... I'm not sure that I even need to. These deep connections between self and environment, time and memory, turn my mind automatically to matters spiritual; do you find the same?

As, last night, I watched the last of the sun make the expansive Severn Estuary glow fiercely, I thought about these things and I spontaneously found myself saying thank you for my life, for the opportunity to be part of such a spectacular thing as this world.



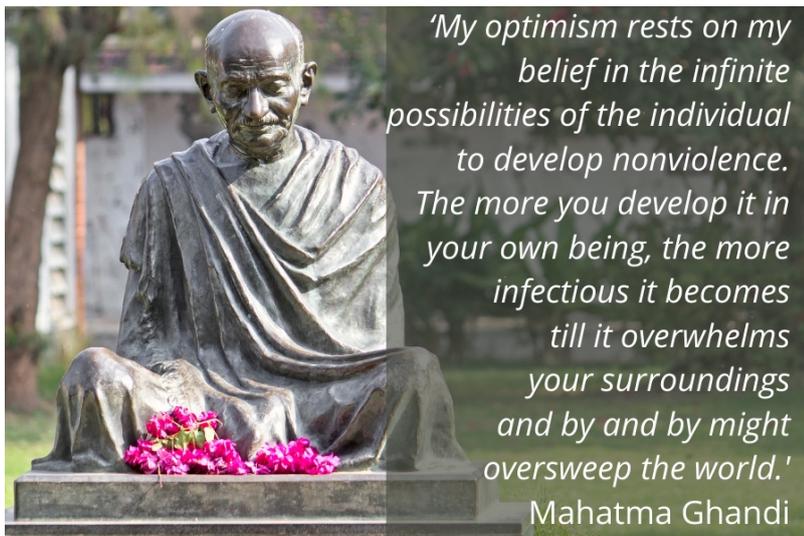
## **Sunday 27<sup>th</sup>**

For my last day of this batch of TFTD, I'm going to turn to a little book that a dear friend gave me a few years ago. It's called *Peacemaking Day By Day*, and has a daily short reading for every day of the year.

My friend found it contained much wisdom that helped her, and specifically hunted it down via the small publisher to obtain a copy for me - something I found very touching. She was right that I'd like it, though. I'm on my third or fourth annual cycle now.

The thought for today (on the day of writing) is from Gandhi. It partially reflects and extends my mood yesterday, when I sensed something of the power contained in the interaction of a single soul and the world in which it lives.

*'My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence. The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your surroundings and by and by might oversweep the world.'*



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Mahatma Gandhi