



A lightbulb moment

Heather Smith *reflects on* Matthew 16:13-20

If you had asked an ordinary Jewish person in the first century, or even a Jewish scholar, about their expectations of the Messiah, they would have been unlikely to say that he (and it would have been a he) would be the Son of God. In Jewish circles there was, and still is, no such expectation. Yet this is what Simon (soon to become Peter) declares when asked who he believes Jesus is.

What kind of person must Jesus have been, to elicit this response from Peter? He must have been quite extraordinary. We have the sense that the response was not thought out, not something that Peter had been considering, not something he had been waiting for an opportunity to say.

Sometimes we surprise ourselves by what we say. We might find ourselves uttering a profound statement that seems to have simply bypassed the brain and come from nowhere. The quote, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?", attributed to E. M. Forster, puts the experience well.

Jesus explains Peter's surprising, and surprised, belief statement by saying that it is his Father in heaven who has revealed it to Peter. Whether or not we call it divine revelation, there is certainly something spiritual about lightbulb moments that come when we least expect them. They can send us down a completely different track in life. ☺

Living God, speak to us through our misunderstanding and the fog of life and change the way we think about you. May our lives reflect new perspectives and inspire different relationships and better choices. Amen.

International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

by Lisa Tulfer

On this day in 1791, a group of slaves in what is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic started an uprising which was a crucial step towards the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. In 1998 the United Nations declared it International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.

We tend to think that slavery was abolished in the nineteenth century, thanks to campaigners such as William Wilberforce, and John Newton of "Amazing Grace" fame. But slavery is alive and kicking. Worldwide, an estimated forty million people are enslaved. It is hard to be certain of figures, but estimates for the UK vary from ten thousand to more than a hundred and thirty thousand, in domestic servitude, forced labour, and sexual exploitation. As followers of Jesus, whose mission was to "proclaim release to the captives" (Luke 4:18), we are challenged to be vigilant for signs of modern slavery in our midst: www.antislavery.org/slavery-today ☺

"The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

Martin Luther (1483-1546), German professor, composer and monk

Summer holidays

by Andrew Lyon

Andrew Lyon concludes his series of reflections on the summer holidays.

In a few weeks' time, in September, Jewish people will mark the High Holidays, or High Holy Days, a time of family, retreat and celebration for the start of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. But this is also a time of judgement, with a period of repentance of one's sins and forgiveness of others, until Yom Kippur.

September also marks the beginning of the new academic year and, even for those of us whose schooldays are long gone, that back-to-school feeling marks the end of summer. Holidays are about a time of restoration and, ultimately, re-energising. They help us reorientate for new beginnings. So while we're enjoying this time let us promise ourselves to preserve something of this holy time of holidays each month, each week and even each day when the new term starts. Where might we find spaces of restoration, introspection, retreat and reorientation in our busy routines? How might we stay refreshed and focused? ☺