

Thought for the Day: 31 Aug–6 Sept 2020

by Jenny Mutch

Monday - Fortitude

I love walking. When I have the time I will walk miles, exploring new places, often with others, but sometimes alone, especially when I need to find the courage to face and work through a difficult situation.

This exploration can take me to uncomfortable physical and emotional places, where I need to find inner strength to overcome fear of the unknown.

I'm glad to say that the whiteout in the picture was short-lived and resulted in a great escape exercise, sliding down hills in Derbyshire, with frozen gloves and hat and icicles in my boots as a result!

But not all difficult situations are that short-lived. We can all recall times when we have felt our fortitude waning and asked: 'Where do I go from here?' Yet, equally, we can recall people we admire who appear incredibly resilient and able to carry on in the face of adversity. Nelson Mandela once said: 'Let your courage rise with danger', so strong was his belief that attitudes could change through action, protest and his own persecution.



To me, the following perfectly sums up fortitude:

Those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.

They will soar on high wings like eagles.

They will run and not grow weary;

They will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40. 31

Lord Jesus, I may never face the persecution experienced by many of your followers, but when I am faced with my own adversaries, give me courage and devotion to overcome them.

Tuesday - Justice

In our bedroom, we have a picture entitled 'The Balance Shifts'. It was given to my husband (aka Forbes Mutch) many years ago following a family bereavement. It now serves to remind us how unbalanced the world is and ask the question: 'What we can do to make it a more balanced, more just place?'

I don't find it easy! Every day in my job, I grapple with how much water is needed for the natural environment, while guaranteeing communities in the UK have on-demand clean water.

We are lucky to be able to get out of bed, make a cup of tea, have a shower and not really think about how the water comes out of our tap.

We are lucky to have the security of a roof over our head. Not everyone is so fortunate: close to home there are people living on the street and we read about thousands of displaced refugees abroad who don't have this or any other luxury.

Every day we can see injustice close by and on a global scale. The question is, what can we do to make our world more just?

Perhaps Mahatma Ghandi's words that you should 'be the change that you wish to see in the world' is a good place to start?

Lord, grant us a vision of a world where the weak are protected; no-one is hungry; riches are shared; different races and cultures live in harmony and where peace is built with justice. Give us the inspiration to build that world.



Wednesday - Prudence

This year, I have finally managed to grow some vegetables in the garden.

It is amazing what you can do with all the parts of a vegetable! Wilting lettuce, floppy celery, carrot tops, beetroot leaves and over-grown lettuce - mix them together, add a little spice and you would be surprised how different one soup can taste from another, even if they look suspiciously similar.

At a superficial level you could argue that I am being prudent whilst, at the same time, recognising that all God's gifts around us have value.

I think, however, prudence is much more than this and is related to the way we act. As Benjamin Franklin once said: 'Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place but, much more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment' (I have yet to master the latter of these).

To be really prudent probably requires listening to good advice and being sufficiently open-minded to recognise the impact of any action taken. I, for one, don't always have the prudence to see things as they really are and keep things in perspective. If you don't believe me, just ask Forbes – he will agree!



Lord, in your hands I place my life and pray that for every decision I make there will be wisdom and prudence so that I will always do your will instead of mine.

Thursday - Temperance

On the odd occasion that we listen to Desert Island Discs, the guests are always asked – what would be your one luxury item?

For me, it is always a toss-up between an ever-growing raspberry bush and a supply of cheese! Cheese usually wins. I love it. I find it really difficult to say no to cheese and I know I eat far more of it than is good for me. Even our wedding cake (albeit carefully disguised with flowers) was a cake of cheese.

According to the Greek philosopher Plato, 'Abstinence is the surety of temperance': where cheese is concerned, I don't have the self-control to abstain.

The Bible reminds us how important temperance (or self-control) is in our lives, epitomised by: 'He who is slow to anger is better than a warrior and he who controls his temper is greater than one who captures a city'. **Proverbs 16. 32**

When looking for an example of a prominent figure who has demonstrated temperance I came across Jack Robinson. He was the first African American baseball player inducted into a major league in 1947. He broke the baseball colour line, heralding the end of racial segregation. Through self-controlled non-violent protest he significantly contributed to the Civil Rights movement. If you have the time, check him out.

Lord, help us to understand the importance of self-control and give us the ability to be disciplined in life. Through prayer, help us to gain the wisdom and knowledge to recognise right from wrong and to give us the strength to do what is right.



Friday - Charity

When we got married, Forbes and I asked for donations to be given to WaterAid instead of wedding presents. What struck me was how passionately this decision was received by our family and friends.

Of course, there are many equally important causes and I imagine that all of us have donated to charities either through financial and/or volunteering offerings.

Charities are completely reliant on donations, but I think it's Mother Teresa's comment, 'It's not how much we give but how much love we put into the giving', that is important.

I have learned a lot about this from Forbes (on that note, I don't usually talk to lost bears in Paddington station with a charity bucket – guess who's in costume). Forbes has an innate ability to strike up a conversation with homeless people on the streets of London, often 'carrying (their) home in one carry bag' (from that great song by Ralph McTell). We have had some truly fascinating conversations with people who seem to sense a genuine interest in their lives. Often listening is just as important as the financial support we might choose to provide.

Charity is bound with Love: unconditional, proactive, beneficial and even sacrificial – the kind of love that God has for us. As **Luke 6. 31** poignantly reminds us: 'Do to others as you would have them do to you'.



Lord, help us to understand true charity. Help us to treat others as we wish to be treated, with respect, with kindness, with love. Help us to see your face in those in need today.

Saturday - Hope

When I was a teenager I wanted to work outside for the Forestry Commission. My hopes were dashed when I was told (in the late 1970s) that women could not work outside and I should consider an office job.

I never lost hope of an environmental vocation, however, and some years later, after much determination, my ambition was rewarded when I began working as an environmental consultant.

Hope has continued in my life: hope of finishing major home improvements; hope that I will be able to see my son soon, who works in New York; hope that Forbes will be able to drive again after the operation on his leg; hope that there will be peace in the world and that good will prevail. I am pleased to confirm that our home improvements are complete and Forbes can drive again – he is very happy!

But of all the hopes, world peace is the one that seems impossible. New conflicts are reported daily, with Sahel, Mexico, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran and the Lebanon just a few places where high conflict risk is constant.

Martin Luther King eloquently reminded us that, 'We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope'; a thought mirrored in **Jeremiah 20. 11**: 'For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not disaster, to give you a future and a hope'. Perhaps that is the biggest hope to remember.

Jesus, we ask that you bring your light and restoring presence to the dark places in the world and our lives, and bring hope to our hearts when we feel defeated or disillusioned.



Sunday - Faith

My brother's dog, Luna, has been to stay for a couple of weeks. She will be gone by the time you read this and I will probably be missing her.

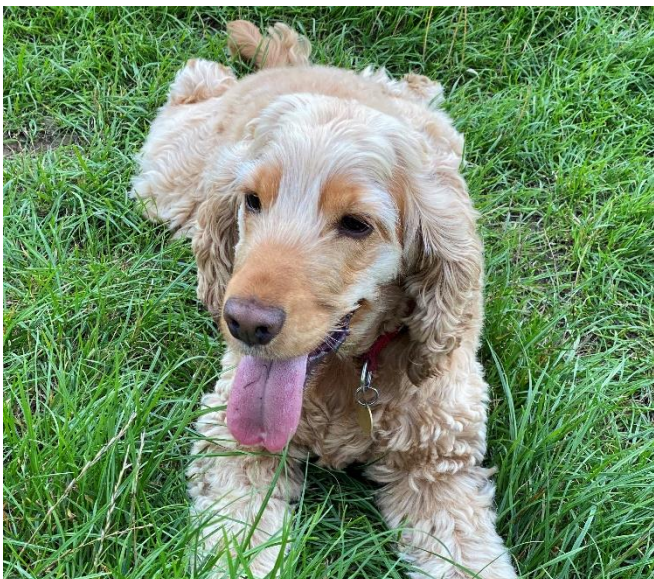
Her faith in me is awe inspiring. She has implicit faith that I will look after her, play with her, feed her, cuddle her and take her for long walks (she will have gone home fitter and with extra muscles on her back legs – just wish I could say the same for myself).

Luna's faith is unconditional and she takes commands via a few words and signals, always watching to make sure I am close by - except when there is a bird to chase in a field, which becomes an impossible temptation for her.

I wish I had that implicit faith. I often question my actions and am sometimes fearful about the consequences of those actions, and I certainly don't feel I always say the right thing in the right place, despite all my best endeavours.

Perhaps I need to learn from Luna the dog, but, also, in my case, remember to trust in the Lord with all my heart, not rely on my own insight and, instead, acknowledge that this way my path will be straight (edited from **Proverbs 3. 5-6**).

So, there you have it at the end of the week: the four cardinal and three theological virtues to which we try to aspire. It's not easy, but having written these Thoughts for the Day, I hope I might be able to better



remember how to apply the values of fortitude, justice, prudence, temperance and charity and have the faith to better understand God's will.

Day by day, O dear Lord, three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly (attributed to Richard of Chichester).