



**Down from**

**a pedestal!**

It's a long way to the ground!

At the present time, we seem to be hearing a lot about loss of political power so it's worth thinking about how people cope with a fall from power – or how people try to deny that they've lost, of course! It must be hard, when you have had a position of power and authority to have to come back down to earth; for any of us to be praised and held up as someone special is a good feeling, and the temptation to hold onto that feeling must be strong.

I guess that at a very basic level, survival depends upon having something of a competitive streak – survival of the fittest and all that - but this is normally tempered by a concern for our companions. Things go wrong when we are persuaded that we have some right to the highest positions, to the best of this and that, when we are persuaded that we have gifts that in reality we have only in small measure. And then we have the fact that society lauds the powerful and the people who make most noise, those who constantly put themselves forward. We like to succeed, and the idea of winning is all around us: if you think not, just check your television programme listings and count how many competitions you find there!

All this is not new and, sadly, is a feature of faith too. In many parts of the Old Testament, we find the concept that wealth is a sign of God's blessing, something that has been adopted by the so-called 'Prosperity Gospel' churches, where one is expected to pray for wealth and possessions, to expect these to come to you as a kind of reward for your faith.

I cannot reconcile this with what was the radical teaching of Jesus, that wealth is not a sign of holiness. To shocked disciples, he said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to make it to heaven. **(Matthew 19:21-26)** No doubt to similarly surprised hearers, he commended the small offering of the widow as being of more significance than the ostentatious giving of the rich. **(Mark 12:41-44)** And as far as worldly power was concerned, Jesus faced it quietly, courageously and ultimately prevailed.

Perhaps we really need to keep this before us at the present time. It is the Kingdom of God which we seek and work to bring, a kingdom of justice and of peace, of quietness and not ostentation. I'm aware that this means we will be rowing against the tide, but so be it.

On a simple level, we maybe need to try to encourage a thinking that doesn't put people on pedestals or that teaches that we shouldn't have to fail. Yes, we strive to be the best we can be, but the best we can be will not be perfection! It's interesting that I've heard a number of people saying that children are now needing to be taught how to cope with failure and, as an ex-teacher, I agree. Failing in a particular task does not mean that you're a failure as a person! Learning to fail and learning *from* that failure is a step towards real maturity of soul.

To close, a lovely statement of Jesus' for everyone who feels small, or even who's fallen off a pedestal:

“But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.” (Mark 10:31)



The ruined Church of St Simeon Stylites, in Syria. He was a holy man who lived on top of a column by the main road, people coming to him for advice and, I suspect, to gawp. The lump of stone on the pillar base in the centre of the picture is all that's left of his column after centuries of souvenir-seekers had carved out pieces. I confess that though I admire the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who hid away in remote spots but welcomed anyone who came to them, I do not admire the stylites who strike me, as publicity seekers! And this is all that's left.

It's good just to be the people we are wherever we are. Think of those who have great authority or popularity. They need our prayers.

A Prayer:

There was a hymn popular in the seventies, "If I were a butterfly", that said, "But I just thank you Father, for making me, me." That's not an easy line for many of us to sing and to really believe.

Loving God and Father of all, Creator and sustainer of all,  
thank you that we each have our own gifts to use for the good of all.  
Thank you for those who have great and obvious gifts of artistry, of management, of invention,  
so many gifts, so many people.  
But we thank you, too, for those who have gifts of encouragement,  
the people who make us feel good just by being there and being themselves,  
those who would deny that they have anything great to offer,  
and yet who give themselves unsparingly for the building up of others.  
Lord, we cannot do without such people: help us show them our love.

We pray for those who have gifts that are enabling the development of a Covid vaccine  
and for those offering themselves to test it out, aware that many are within the Health Service  
and already giving so much.

We pray for all doctors, nurses, carers and all within our hospitals, clinics, surgeries  
and care homes, that by your Spirit they may be given strength when they are weary.  
Give, we pray, we ordinary folk the insight to note when people are stressed by their work,  
by their worries. May we be a quiet presence to be with them and support them.

We pray for those who have great power in the world, in politics, in the media, in industry  
and the judiciary, asking the wisdom of your Spirit to guide them in these troubled times,  
bringing especially the situation in the USA, and in our own nation,  
praying a calm where there is turmoil and a lessening of the tensions gripping so many.

Lord, when we are tempted to put people on a pedestal, help us pause,  
when we are tempted by even a tiny pedestal for ourselves, help us pause,  
and remember the words of Jesus that many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.  
Thank you that Jesus chose a quiet way that led to new life, full life for us all,  
and that we are called to follow that way of service to you and for the good of all creation.  
We pray in Jesus' name, Amen



*Blessings, Ruth*