

Midweek Musings 25th November 2020

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You Never Know

(By Colin Barrable)



What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned each to his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. (1 Corinthians 3: 5 – 7)

I came to know and value this passage on my first trip to Kenya with the charity Hand in Hand, as part of a team from our former Methodist church in Chelmsford. It was quite appropriate, as a large part of our time was spent helping farmers, who were planting passionfruit vines as part of a project to help them earn enough to pay for their children's education. I don't want to bore you with 'our last church', or 'when I went to Kenya', but actually Kenya was a significant time in my growth as a Christian, and this bible passage was the basis of our daily devotions on that first trip – led by Stephanus, a retired Dutch Reform Church minister, and his lovely wife Alta.

And it is really people, our relationship with them and their relationship with us that I am turning over in my mind. In the case of Paul and Apollos, each of them is reliant on the other, and both are reliant on God. It makes me question whether I take enough care over what I do and what I say every time I am conversing or interacting with others - and I think I know the answer!

I don't know if you agree, but when I think of people who have influenced me in my Christian journey, I tend to think first of those older than myself - like my French teacher at boarding school who led the Christian Union group (at first I only went for his wife's home-made cakes), or Stephanus who I have already mentioned, or Glen, a Christian lady through and through, or Uncle Henry, a lifelong Christian and Sunday School teacher. Others, nearer my own age include Sue, a caring and committed house group leader and Clive, leader of the Kenya trips and an untiring church leader and preacher. And, of course, Anne, who I first met at a time when my belief was burning low. She soon sorted that out!

But I also have to say that there have been some younger folk of influence too:

- My niece Sarah, who first dared to go to Kenya with Hand in Hand (and was later featured on Songs of Praise).
- On one of those trips, we had some serious trouble with bees which took all of us to hospital - while we were waiting for attention, a man was wheeled in who looked close to death. While I was wondering if he was contagious, a young American girl who was with us went over to him and simply handed him her bottle of water and gave him a smile.
- Two young ladies joined our church from Youth for Christ. Their hard work and devotion to the job they had undertaken was a lesson to us all.
- A youngster from our youth group was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Her quiet acceptance and positive approach to the situation she had to face was another lesson.

To turn things around, I'm pretty sure that I haven't been a huge influence on many of the people I have met in my life - but the thing is, you never know! Anne will sometimes tell me off for not being more considerate or thoughtful when talking - especially on the phone or when I write emails, and certainly she is right that I sometimes rush in with my view or my opinion without thought or without listening to the other person. Right up until a short time before we came to Clare, I was running the Sunday morning sessions for our youth group, and had been doing so for quite a few years, before which I was teaching younger children in the Sunday School. I'm sure there are others among the Clare Baptist Church congregation who have done similar work, and we know the people who now do so with our own Lighthouse Gang and Sunday Club etc. And none of us know for sure how many of the seeds we sow have borne fruit, or will do one day. Just like Paul and Apollos, we plant the seed, we water it, and we pray that God will see to it that it grows.

In my bible, there are two letters which I treasure. They are from two friends who have seen fit to let me know that I have been able to help them in their Christian journey. Whether or not there is anyone else, I don't know - but God does.

(Photo taken by the author, 2007)