

Connecting faith and daily life

Being the body of Christ

Lisa Tulfer *reflects on* Romans 12:1-8

Today in the letter to the Romans we are given a clear set of instructions about how we should be in relationship with God and also with one another. Firstly, Paul appeals to us to surrender ourselves completely to God. Unlike in the Temple, where live animals are offered to the deity and then sacrificed, we are told to present our own bodies as a living sacrifice. The bodies we present are made new by the risen Christ. We are to open ourselves up to God's transforming power, and to conform our minds to the will of God, rather than to the values of the world.

The way in which we live out the will of God, however, will vary enormously between individuals. In a lively image, we are compared to a body which has many limbs and organs, each with its own function. Through God's grace we are variously assigned our roles and functions, and equipped with the gifts necessary to carry them out. Crucially, however, we are warned about thinking too highly of ourselves and our particular functions. The body of Christ will only work smoothly if all the limbs and organs are working in balance, fulfilling their purpose without envying the activity of the others.

The challenge to each of us, therefore, is to discern the particular function to which God is calling us. 🙏



Holy God, you call us to offer ourselves to you, and to do your will. Help us to hear your call and to discern your will for us, and give us the gifts we need to live out our calling. Amen.

National Parks

Exmoor

by Jo Jones

I cross the cattle grids and I am in open country. I feel my mind expanding and my heart soaring. Exmoor offers vast spaces and huge skies. Farmed for generations, yet here domestic animals get a chance to live freely. I love the sight of Exmoor ponies or traditional Horn sheep roaming the moors at their own pace. At their own pace is perhaps the key: here we can

walk, cycle or – with my admiration – run, or sit and absorb all that comes to us if we take the time to allow it. Binoculars and a bird book help me spot a rare ring ouzel on a distant rocky scree, a hand lens takes me into the world of the lichen growing at my knee and flourishing in Exmoor's clean air.

As with faith, the more time I take in stillness, the more awe-inspiring is everything that I see.

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk 🙏

“What I kept, I lost. What I spent, I had. What I gave, I have.”

Persian proverb

Animals of the Bible

The snake

by Caroline Fletcher

There are mixed attitudes towards snakes in biblical writings. Asps and vipers inhabited Israel, so it is unsurprising that snakes were feared because of their bites (Amos 5:18-19). Serpents were often called “fiery”, possibly due to the burning sensation their venom caused (Isaiah 14:29).

However, even the snake in the Garden of Eden is not portrayed completely negatively. The Genesis story

reflects a widespread belief that snakes were clever saying “the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal” (3:1). This idea is also behind Jesus' appeal for his disciples to be “wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16).

Snakes were associated, too, with healing and immortality. In Numbers 21 many Israelites are bitten by snakes and God tells Moses to hold up a bronze snake so anyone looking upon it may be healed. Later, Jesus likens the lifting up of the bronze snake to his crucifixion, which also brought new life (John 3:14-15). 🙏