

Letting off steam



Richard Greatrex *reflects on* Romans 12:9-end

In the early eighteenth century one of the first tracts published by a newly formed Christian charity was "The Baseness and Perniciousness of the Sin of Slandering and Backbiting". Sharp tongues and gossip were a problem then, as they are today. They were certainly an issue that Paul came up against in the first generation of the Church.

Today's reading from Romans splits into two sections: the first (verses 9-12) is concerned with the way believers treat their Christian colleagues, while verses 13-21 focus outwards to the whole of society, especially to those who stand in opposition to the Church. Our English translations muffle the strength of Paul's original phrase in verse 17, when he tells his listeners to "take thought" before speaking or acting in response to the words or deeds of others.

Social media provide an instant outlet for all our frustrations about the behaviour of our peers and it has become almost an automatic reaction to tap out an immediate cutting reply to any perceived slight. Such instantaneous responses have caused the destruction of many a good friendship and the escalation of nascent enmity. Paul's concern goes deeper than the poison spread by vengeance, whether petty or profound, because his whole faith is founded on the cross, the ultimate example of evil being repaid counter-intuitively, with a sacrificial act of goodness. ☺

Holy God, we pray that we might have the courage and wisdom to hold back from instant judgement and, in the face of evil, to offer to the world lives that mirror your ever-loving goodness. Amen.

Foraging Blackberries

by Caroline Hodgson

Are there blackberries in the hedgerows near you? Your answer will depend largely on which part of the country you live in and what the summer has been like. But in most places, even for city dwellers, there will be some sign of blackberries, either in the form of the ripe deep purple fruit, or the smaller unripe red berry.

It's around this time of year that I start to anticipate the end of summer with a pang of regret. Did I take full advantage of the longer days and warmer weather?

Could I have done more walking / gardening / cycling / outdoor swimming? But when I see the first signs of autumn abundance I'm reminded that each season has its gifts and I say a short prayer of thanksgiving. I know that I'll soon be enjoying jams, crumbles and pies, and that a few berries chucked into my breakfast muesli will turn the milk a lovely velvety rich purple – that cheers me up on the bleakest autumn morning!

Always forage safely and sustainably. For more information go to www.nationaltrust.org.uk and www.woodlandtrust.org.uk ☺

“ I sought to hear the voice of God and climbed the topmost steeple, but God declared ‘Go down again – I dwell among the people.’ ”

John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Roman Catholic cardinal, theologian and poet

National Parks

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

by Jo Jones

I have not visited this National Park, north of Glasgow – a typical failure to appreciate what is in my own country, when I have travelled extensively in Europe. But looking at photos on the internet I am inspired, wondering if I am fit enough to climb Ben Lomond.

What I do know, however, is that mountains are extremely important for our world. They

supply food and clean energy, and sixty to eighty per cent of the world's fresh water. They cover around twenty-two per cent of the earth's land surface and are home to thirteen per cent of the world's population. They look majestic, yet their fragile ecosystems are under threat from climate change, land degradation and over-exploitation.

In the Bible, mountaintops are "thin" places, where God is met and heard. I think they continue to remind us what matters in life. www.lochlomond-trossachs.org ☺