

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT

Jesus the Sherpa?



Dear Friends,

I have had a wish since childhood days to climb Mount Everest. Recently I noticed a TV programme about Mt. Everest which focussed particularly on the Sherpas, the men who accompany enthusiastic climbers and support them to reach the peak. It seems that there can often be up to one thousand people trying to scale the heights to the top of the world! The climb looked even more dangerous and daunting than ever (is this because I am getting older and wiser or just more realistic about such a challenge?). Having begun to watch in order to have more views of the Himalayas, I was truly struck by the amazing and integral role of the Sherpa.

It is very clear that the Sherpa role is a vital form of service for climbers, for their experience, knowledge and strength is essential as they become caring companions on the challenging journey up and down the mountain. Their role as servants struck me as having an inspiring side to it in terms of human care and of spiritual strength. It also has aspects which spoke to me of how Jesus fulfilled his mission and followed the Way of the Cross.

The Sherpas have a religious belief, being Buddhists, and as they journey they undertake religious devotion and the spiritual side of the journey by saying prayers and putting up prayer flags, spinning wheels and placing stones on cairns. They recognise that the journey needs spiritual strength, and they encourage climbers to join them in prayer. They have lived in the area for many centuries, and their lungs and biorhythms are partially adapted to cope with the thinning air and the strain of climbing. They bear most of the burden of

the essential supplies needed for the climb, and they need to use all their experience to avoid disaster. They are a reminder that life is often arduous and challenging, and we need to be accompanied in our personal journey by caring people and the presence of God. Lent for Christians is a time for reaffirming our desire to follow Jesus' way of love in an unloving world, acknowledging his presence amid the changes and chances of life.

One sad aspect to the story is that the Sherpas do not receive a high payment for their work, and they live in traditional ways, often seeing their families only once or twice a year. The man who was followed in the programme could not return at that time due to flooding. He clearly had not been paid very much, which seems very unfair considering that would-be mountaineers must spend thousands of pounds to travel and tackle the mountain. At the same time, it seemed that he felt happy with his lot, that it was his purpose in life and if he was given an expensive apartment, car and cash his way of life would be destroyed. Jesus embraced poverty, and it is said in the Bible that *"though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor"*. He was not among us to build a career or amass money and find "comfort" – Jesus was clear that he came *"to serve, not to be served"* – a challenge to us all when we consider our desires, hopes and expectations.

Climbing a mountain is never going to be easy, indeed it can be fatal and many people have died on Everest's slopes. Some of them have been the Sherpas themselves, yet they continue their work because it is the way they see their purpose. In this sense their service has a Christ-like quality to it,

that they go forward courageously, knowing the danger. Jesus was very aware of the pain and suffering he must bear, the anguish he will experience, and the lonely death he will embrace. And if the burden which he bore to the hill of Golgotha was the cross itself, then the spiritual weight he bears and holds is all our sins and weakness, as he shares our mortality to the final degree, dying with us and for us.

I ended up really respecting the work of the Sherpas, their religious devotion, their selflessness and their willingness to serve in extreme circumstances. Their role made me think deeply about my own life and my values, and with Lent and Holy Week approaching I realised that their lives had enhanced my understanding of Jesus' mission, who embraced our humanity in all its glory and shame. If I ever do go up Everest, I know I will need some Sherpas. In daily living and understanding our spiritual journey through life to its peak, I believe we all need to feel the presence of Jesus who alone can give us the fullness of God's love and salvation.

Love,
Jo

Lent

Lent draws our attention away from temptation so that we can concentrate on our spiritual lives. People have different ways of using this time. Some give up alcohol or chocolate, one person I know has been urged by his health-conscious son to give up coffee, others give up eating meat (this sounds a very wise option after all the uncertain variations of meat content in some of our processed foods recently). Others take something up for Lent, whether charity work, a particular project, a desire to heal a broken relationship, reading a significant book and/or spending extra time in Bible reading and prayer.

Hopefully when we find our Lenten weeks have brought real benefits we will want to continue them in some way, even if it is scaled-back – a moderate amount of chocolate? – but perhaps if we have

realised that we can change our lives for the better we will not want to turn back.

A Lent Prayer

Lord Jesus, you fasted and prayed for forty days.

Help me to fast and pray during this time of Lent.

Free my mind from distraction and worry, that I may be more aware of your love, and more sensitive to others.

Give me a spirit of generosity, so that I might share my gifts more freely with those who have less.

Teach me to pray, that I might offer you praise and be more thankful.

Help me make time to reflect on your Word; may it challenge, console, and purify me. Be with me in times of hurt, doubt, and confusion; unite my sufferings to yours and let them be redemptive.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit, free me from sin, let me rise with you this Easter.

I ask this in the name of Jesus, who died that I might have life to the full.

Amen.

Jo's Family News

Tom Loveridge, Jo and Doug's youngest son is marrying Roshni Kara in Leicester on August 10th 2013. They will have both a Christian ceremony and a Hindu ceremony reflecting their religious traditions and it is very exciting for our whole family.

Pete Loveridge has now returned after a year in South Korea, teaching English as a foreign language, and we are pleased that he will be living with us at the Vicarage for the foreseeable future. He hopes to follow a career in teaching in the coming months.