

The dead of night

Heather Smith *reflects on* Genesis 32:22-31

Jacob's family is complicated. His brother Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for some stew because he is hungry, but then he is furious with Jacob. Jacob pretends to be Esau in order to steal his father's blessing. Jacob's uncle cheats him of the wife he promised, Rachel, and gives him Leah instead, then insists that he serve him for a second seven-year term to pay for Rachel.

Now Jacob is concerned about what will happen when he meets his brother again. There is nothing like family relationships to make us feel internal conflict. We wrestle with love, loyalty, duty, jealousy, hurt, to name but a few emotions. Theologians have puzzled about the meaning of this passage in

Genesis, where Jacob wrestles with an unknown stranger he presumes to be God. But in the circumstances, wrestling surely describes the uncomfortable feelings he must be feeling when he thinks about meeting Esau. Perhaps it is only the presence of a wrestling partner that prevents him from running away in the night.

The dead of night is exactly when we find ourselves at our most emotionally vulnerable, our minds not quite rational, unable to think things through logically and likely to find ourselves much more fearful than necessary. We may come through the night wounded, but God does not desert us and we are able to face whatever awaits us in the morning. ☺



Be with us, Lord, in the dark places of our lives and the dead of night, when worries beset us and rational thought deserts us. Bring us safe to the light of the morning and show us a clear path. Amen.

Hymn writers

Charlotte Elliott

by Caroline Hodgson

Charlotte Elliott, who lived from 1789 until 1871, came from an influential evangelical family. Her maternal grandfather, Henry Venn, was a founder of the Clapham Sect – a network of Christians who shared moral and spiritual values and campaigned for an end to slavery. As a young woman Charlotte was a talented musician, artist and

writer, known for her sparkling wit. Following a debilitating illness in 1821, however, she was largely confined indoors. Her life has been described as “hidden”, although she became a prolific editor and writer, penning numerous poems and hymns. It's said that she wrote her best-known hymn – “Just As I am, without One Plea” – when the family had gone out and Charlotte, left behind at home, became overwhelmed by a sense of her own loneliness and uselessness. It poignantly expresses her sense of being “poor, wretched, blind,” and her faith that Jesus will “welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve”. ☺

Summer holidays

by Andrew Lyon

A visible display of Christian faith is seen as terribly un-British. Faith is a private affair, says culture to Christians. In response many Christians say the opposite; we are to be salt and light, and by setting apart certain times and seasons we draw attention to the world beyond the here and now.

In truth, we don't often let the sacred intersect with the day to day. Last week I wrote about

how the concept of holy days fascinated me as a child. I think it was because interrupting the routine for an explicitly religious devotion showed confidence in our faith, something we are in danger of losing today. But the sacred has to break into the everyday. Sundays are our weekly reminder, and holidays in general are also a time set apart, to step back and take stock. That in itself is a spiritual act, particularly if Jesus is the larger framework for our life. ☺

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“ I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”