

Malvern Mashal 30

Perspectives on the Malvern Hills

As many of you know, we took on an elderly Labrador dog to long term foster thirty months ago. He is quite a handsome dog as you will see from these pictures that Tony Somervell took when he was staying in our house: see <http://www.photocanvas4all.com/> and <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tony-portfolio/> to enjoy more of Tony's photographic gift. Prince is lovely with people, but because of abuse in his past, he is totally antisocial when it comes to meeting other dogs. You would laugh to see us as we weave our way, sometimes walking in figures of eight to avoid bumping into other canines. If Dom is with me, one of us shouts out, "Dog alert!" and the evasive manoeuvres begin.



This morning as I set out to walk the dog on the Malvern Hills, I found my path blocked by two strong dogs, which pushed me to take a route I had never even noticed before. It is not always easy to avoid encountering dogs on the narrow paths up in the Malvern Hills, where I do my high level altitude prayer walks on my way back from taking Dom to school. (We couldn't get him to any school in Malvern; they were all full, so I have quite a drive over mountains each morning to a nearby village).

The fact that the obvious route was barred made me reflect on how the Lord so often works things out in such a way that the route we had been hoping or planning to take turns out to be blocked, and we are obliged to take another way instead – which is, in retrospect, the one He always had in mind for us. How good He is at shepherding and ushering us towards His plans and purposes – although it can be pretty challenging at times!

At one point on this walk, I reached a sheer face of a quarry. If it had been a matter of life and death, I might or might not have been able to scramble up the several hundred feet of near vertical rock, but I knew that there was a much easier path just round the corner out of sight that



would loop its way to the top. That is a picture we are hanging onto as we face various rather mountainous challenges, including the fact that at some point in the future a new curate will be appointed and our lease will expire on the house that we are renting from the Diocese.

This house has been perfect for us beyond words, and we feel so welcome, wanted and secure in Malvern that we very much hope the Lord will make it possible for us to stay here. Nobody currently knows when the appointment will

be made, but there is a good chance that it will not be for a while yet, which is certainly a relief for us. It is so important for Dom to have continuity of schooling. Ros loves slipping up to Birmingham every day by train; she always marvels at how short the journey feels, and how she “pops up” so rapidly in a completely different place – and then delights again in the evening to find herself amid the Malvern Hills.

The last few weeks have been exceptionally fruitful: it has been wonderful to see the Lord breaking through again and again in counselling, meetings and in many other ways. As I was reflecting on this, the Lord said that this did not mean that the preceding months had been any less fruitful – it is simply that the work had been longer term and therefore less dramatic and less visible. The ingredients that make up the cake, although they may be less “in the limelight,” are every bit as important as the icing on the top of it!

I have spent a lot of time this summer pondering Jesus’ command to “Judge not that you be not judged.” It is a vital statement but one that needs serious unpacking. One thing is for sure: we will only be able to do it if we are using the right set of measuring tools. I wrote this snippet of a prayer for our forthcoming CD, *Connections*, because it hints at an important truth.

ROBERT So often, Lord, when we are feeling insecure,
it is because we are using the wrong set of measuring tools.
Were we to see the weighing scales
You use to value all we do,
we might not recognise them as such,
for You evaluate by entirely different criteria,
seeking less the outcomes that the world considers good
than the love and devotion with which we carry out our tasks –
and the measure of obedience that lies within them.

ROS So realign our heart’s desire
to be more in tune with Yours,
for the more we succeed in doing this
the more joy we will know in our spirits
and the more comfort we will bring to others too.

