

The Small Things

It was November. I had planned a longish coastal walk, intending to walk a section from Selworthy to Culbone on the Somerset Coast, UK. Yesterday evening and early this morning, a keenness to walk from Morteheo to Ilfracombe kept coming to mind but eventually I discounted it because of the difficulty of getting a bus back to my car at Morteheo. Either way the forecast was for rain and sun. I knew the driving times to reach the start, the bus times, and the terrain on the walk from Selworthy, so set off with notes of the bus departures and a map.

As I drove up the A361, part of me continued to wrestle over the choice of walks, I suppose deep down hankering after the Morteheo walk. About a mile from the roundabout where my drive to the two start points would deviate, I said, "Lord, this is the final chance to make a decision. Which way should I go?" I didn't seem to get an answer, so I turned right towards Selworthy as planned.

Within a very short distance it didn't feel right. As I drove through Bolham, I said to myself, "This isn't right." A mile later I found a place to turn round and I drove back to the roundabout and set off for Morteheo instead. I had no map for this 9 mile walk and no information on bus times and as the road climbed up the hills above Tiverton, heavy rain lashed the car. Despite the evidence it now felt right!

The rain cleared away. Near Morteheo I found a bus-stop with a timetable on it and was able to write down times from Ilfracombe for my return. At Morteheo, I walked without any map across the hills towards the coast, following a path from the village that, to my delight, descended to the coast path at exactly the point I had left it on my previous walk. The sun was bright, the clouds dramatic and the sun picked out the cliffs of Lundy Island with a clarity I had never seen. I skipped down the grassy slope and thanked God. I climbed up the rocky summit above Morte Point and turned to look eastwards towards Bull Point. The sun shone onto the cliffs, casting crisp shadows and turning the slabs of slate almost white. The view was stunning. Below me, the north-west winds were whipping up the waves and after a mile of walking rain fell. I was content. I put on my waterproof trousers and coat and I was glad to be walking with my back to the driving rain. Shortly after Bull Point the rain eased off and the skies cleared. For the remaining seven miles the sun shone, the wind blew strongly enough to remove my cap four times, and the sea grew rougher.

When I reached my destination in Ilfracombe I only had forty minutes to wait for the bus, which is not bad for a two-hourly service. The bus was the only one on the day's timetable that went first through Woolacombe and as it drove along the coast road I saw a glorious sunset over the sea, making a wonderful finale to my day.

So why is this so significant: because the witness in my spirit of what God was indicating made more sense than the reasoning of my intellect and my careful planning to provide myself with the necessary information. Above all else the significance was, and is, that God was answering my prayer and guiding me in something that on the surface is so inconsequential: a walk by the sea. If he is guiding me on this small thing, can I not trust him to guide me on the much more important matters? And if at the moment, and in some issues over the years, he does not seem to

be saying anything, does not this experience indicate that he has not abandoned me: I have to trust him in the apparent silence, especially when it makes no sense to me.

So this small thing is a big thing. It ties in with something I read in the *i* newspaper in a comment on the underachieving England rugby team. The author compared England with the New Zealand team who had beaten England by the very narrow margin of 24 points to 21. The headline read: 'England trail the All Blacks in all the little big things.' Chris Hewett, the Rugby Correspondent wrote: "If they [the England coaching staff] are correct in their assertion that the big things are in place, it must be the small things that separate the sides. The trouble comes when the things that seem small are, in reality, symptoms of a large and serious issue."

The small thing of God directing me so clearly, through a witness in my spirit, rather than by my intellect, on a matter so seemingly trivial, is in fact a big thing. It is big enough to answer all the doubts about whether God is still involved in our family and silenced the taunts of the enemy. This small thing is big enough to bring assurance!