



Be bold

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Exodus 32:1-14

The people of Israel are travelling from slavery in Egypt to freedom in their own land. At Mount Sinai they stop, and their leader Moses disappears up the mountain to meet with the God they cannot see. They become restless. Who knows when, or even whether, Moses will come back? So eventually they make themselves a new leader, a god made of gold, a god they can see and touch and believe in.

The Lord is furious, and tells Moses that he is going to destroy the people and start his project all over again with the descendants of Moses. Moses' reply is perhaps one of the most extraordinary addresses to God in the whole of scripture. "Don't do that," he says to God. "Think what the Egyptians will say, they will think you had evil intentions all along. Think of your reputation! And what about your promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Are you going to break your promises now?"

"And," we are told, "the Lord changed his mind".

Our prayers are usually considerably more polite than those of Moses. But perhaps even for us there is a place for saying exactly what we think, for raising objections about what God is allowing to happen in the world, and for making bold demands. God, it seems, is willing to listen. 🙏

God of surprising grace, give us the courage to be bold when we come before you. Help us to be honest in our prayers, and to know that you are ever willing to listen and to respond. Amen.

Being a poet-in-residence

Finding words

by Julia McGuinness

As poet-in-residence I wander round the cathedral, open to what words might arise. I spot a hat perched on the handle of a heavy wooden door into the nave. Later, outside the main entrance, I overhear a mother with a small boy lamenting a hat's loss. "Was it a blue denim sun hat?" I ask. "Yes," she says. I lead them back through the cloisters and reunite boy's head and hat. The incident becomes the poem I was looking for.

Poetry comes to life at the margins. Former archbishop Rowan Williams describes poetry and prayer as "what happens when you've run out of ordinary language... about the world being much more than you can imagine".

I volunteer to contribute a poem to the cathedral's worship, and am given a challenging passage for Compline – an angelic battle in heaven and Satan overthrown. I don't want merely to re-tell the story. I need a fresh angle. Eventually it comes. Hollow, in the ground where Satan falls, like the space in believers' hearts as the accuser's voice is silenced, now open to new words: salvation; beloved; peace. 🙏

“Nothing is yet in its true form.”

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), writer and theologian

Faith and mental health

by Katharine Smith

Katharine Smith continues her series looking at the role that a church community can play in supporting someone through mental distress.

Andrew is recovering from a prolonged period of depression, during which his mind was "completely stifled". He couldn't concentrate on anything and lost interest in life. He thought God was punishing him but he couldn't work out what he had done to deserve it. Although he was extremely angry with

God, he continued to attend church. "Eventually I plucked up courage to tell the others in my prayer group about my illness, my struggle with faith and my feelings of guilt and anger towards God." Someone responded by reading the story in Mark 9, about the father who begs Jesus to heal his son. Jesus says, "All things can be done for the one who believes," and the father cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Andrew says: "I felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I realised I didn't have to have absolute faith. I could offer to God what little I did have and ask him to give me more." 🙏