

## Taking time to stand and stare!

At the end of April and in early May Roger and I had a wonderful holiday in Scotland. The main part was a two week stay in a cottage on the island of Mull. It was a beautiful cottage set under the cliffs at Gribun on the west side of the island. We had no near neighbours and in front of the cottage



was a little used single track road and the shoreline, so we didn't see much in the way of people from the cottage. We had no television and barely any internet access so we knew little of what was going on in the outside world. For us, the world really seemed to shrink to the size of just what we could see and hear around us.

We actually spent time just looking – whether at the eagles soaring over the cottage, the otter swimming in the sea and sitting on the rocks in front of the cottage, the lambs being born around us and learning to walk and leap and run, or beautiful sunsets over the bay. When we were out in the car or driving, we made sure that binoculars were always to hand, for sightings of seals, otters, sea eagles and other birds. One day we spent a couple of hours just sitting having our lunch and watching a mother and her two otter cubs swimming around in the sea. Another day, we spent half an hour looking at a tiny speck in the sky – a sea eagle soaring high above us. The best day was spent on Lunga, one of the Treshnish Isles, sitting amongst the puffins – just watching them coming in and out of their burrows and, wandering around within touching distance – a truly memorable experience.

For me, this time of just sitting and looking, felt a real luxury. It took a few days before I felt comfortable spending time like this and not feeling guilty that I wasn't actually 'doing' anything. Fortunately, I quickly realised that it was ridiculous to be feeling guilty! But I wonder how many of us fall into the trap of forgetting to look at the wonders of God's creation around us. Maybe we cast a glance from time to time, but how often do we actually look. When we arrived on Mull, most of the trees were bare but while we were there, the leaves started to unfurl and beautiful fresh green fragile leaves started to unfurl. To spend time noticing this happening and looking right up close at leaves is something that I wouldn't normally bother doing – but in stopping and looking at them, I was reminded of the amazing fact that each year, without any human intervention, creation renews itself. Trees don't need us to tell them it's time to open their leaves, birds don't need us to tell us they need to build their nests, lambs don't need us to tell them how to walk or suckle from their mothers, otters don't need us to tell them how to fish. While we may sometimes like to think of ourselves at the centre of creation, we aren't. In fact, sadly, all too often our contribution to creation is to damage it. Looking at creation is a good reminder that we

aren't at the centre of everything – we are, in fact, part of something wonderful that exists around us.

I often come back from holiday inspired to do things differently or to do new things and all too often, this never happens as the busy-ness of life takes over. But this year it seems different. It seems that I have come back with two thoughts that aren't really about doing things but are about an awareness of how my life could be enhanced. The first of these is summed up by a poem, that you may know, by William Henry Davies, and reminds me that a life well lived, a life that is well balanced, is one in which I do take time to stop and stare.....

*What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.  
No time to stand beneath the boughs  
And stare as long as sheep or cows.  
No time to see, when woods we pass,  
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.  
No time to see, in broad daylight,  
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.  
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance.  
No time to wait till her mouth can  
Enrich that smile her eyes began.  
A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.*

The second thought lodged in my mind flows on from this, in that stopping, staring, delighting in creation so naturally flows into prayer and a delighting in the Creator.

When I look at the beauties of the world, I cannot fail to see the hand of a loving God behind what I see. Psalm 148 calls us to do just this: *'Let all things praise the name of the Lord, because they were created at his command.... All creation, come and praise the name of the Lord. Praise his name alone. The glory of God is greater than heaven and earth.'*

This summer, let me encourage you to stop and stand and stare at the beautiful things that you see around you - and they are to be found on our doorsteps where we live, not just on the island of Mull or anywhere else we might go on holiday. As you notice what is around you, may your hearts sing with praise to the God who lovingly made the world and all that it is in it, and as in doing so, said "It is good!"