# "DISAPPOINTMENT"

**Geoffrey R Usher**

A troubled man paid a visit to his rabbi: a wise and good rabbi, as all rabbis try to be.

"Rabbi," said he, wringing his hands, "I am a failure. More than half the time I do not succeed in doing what I must do."

"Oh?" said the rabbi.

"Please say something wise, Rabbi," said the man. After much pondering, the rabbi spoke as follows: " Ah, my son, I give you this wisdom: Go and look on page 930 of The New York Times Almanac for the year 1970, and you will find peace of mind maybe." "Ah," said the man, and he went away and did that thing. Now this is what he found: The listing of the life-time batting averages of all the greatest baseball players. Ty Cobb, the greatest slugger of them all, had a lifetime average of only .367. Even Babe Ruth didn't do so good.

So the man went back to the rabbi and said in a questioning tone: "Ty Cobb - .367 - that's it?" "Right, " said the rabbi. "Ty Cobb - .367. He got a hit once out of every three times at bat. He didn't even bat 500 - so what can you expect already?"

"Ah," said the man, who had thought he was a wretched failure because only half the time he did not succeed at what he must do.
Theology is amazing, and holy books abound.

That story comes from Robert Fulghum's book, All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.

In Sheffield, in summer 2002, Ann and I booked a four-night package tour, by coach, to Paris, for what would have been my first trip to France. After several telephone calls to query the non-arrival of our confirmatory letter, we finally learned, on the Thursday afternoon preceding our planned departure, that the non-receipt of that letter indicated that the coach was full and we would not be able to go - even though my cheque had been cleared at the bank, and on the booking form I had requested that we be informed as soon as possible if the dates we wanted were not available.

As you may well imagine, that news was disappointi ng, as well as annoying.

Frustration has been described as the feeling of disappointment when results are what you expect but consequences are what you get. And Letitia Elizabeth Landon commented: "How disappointment tracks the steps of hope."

More pungent is Samuel Johnson's reflection:

> He who expects much will be often disappointed; yet disappointment seldom cures us of expectation, or has any other effect than that of producing a moral sentence or peevish exclamation.

I have to admit: There was a peevish exclamation or two!

However, !nn got busy on the phone and the internet - a wonderful device, I understand! - and she was able to make an alternative booking with another travel agent.

Later that evening, I was asked by a neighbour if I would conduct the funeral of his mother-in-law, who was another neighbour. The funeral was already booked for the Friday because of family members needing to travel from Northampton and Milton Keynes. I had to tell him that I would not be able to do it, because I would be *en route,* returning home at the end of our holiday to France.

I had already had to tell members of my congregation that I would not be able to conduct a funeral when that had to be postponed from the 12th to the 15th - the day we were originally booked to leave Sheffield at the start of our trip.

Our second travel agent - Plan B - had said that someone would ring me at Upper Chapel on the Friday - while Ann was doing a day of supply teaching - to confirm the details. I did not have the agent's name or phone number, so I couldn't ring to check when I had not received any call. It was only when Ann got in to the Chapel late in the afternoon that
. she was able to ring - and get the news that there were no bookings to be had. We were, again, not going to France. We were, again, disappointed.

"He who expects much will be often disappointed..."

The poet and satirist Alexander Pope wrote:

> "Blessed is the man who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed", was the ninth beatitude which a man of wit (who, like a man of wit, was a long time in gaol) added to the eighth.

At that stage, we decided that we would not continue trying to get to France, even though I had obtained a supply of euros from my bank. Instead, we thought we would follow Mark Twain's advice, that "the one sensible thing to do with a disappointment is to put it out of your mind and think of something cheerful."

We changed our plans. I called in to our neighbour's that evening to say that, after all, I would be able to conduct his mother-in--law's funeral. And I did attend my Chapel member's funeral, a lovely service led by Chris Rosling at Fulwood Old Chapel.

And we. planned that, in between the two funerals, on the Monday and Friday, we would get away for a couple of days of Bed-and-Breakfast, not in Paris but perhaps somewhere in Yorkshire.

On Tuesday morning, I thought I would do a bit of work in our back garden before we headed off. I ended up spending all of the morning in the garden. By the time I had finished, and taken two trips to the local dumpit/recycling site to get rid of the rubble and old asphalt, and had a shower, we had lunch at home rather than rush out.

Somewhere along the line we also decided that we would save the cost of two or three nights of bed-and-breakfast by staying at home and just heading out somewhere each day. The money saved could be spent on things like plants for the garden or paint for the house, or . . .

So, after lunch at home on Tuesday, we headed over to the east coast - Cleethorpes and Mabelthorpe.

It was a fairly leisurely day, covering just over 200 miles in nine hours, with quite a lot of back roads and bits of walking here and there, and an excellent evening meal at the Durham Ox pub in Thimbleby, near Horncastle.

It was a good day.

Wednesday morning *saw* me out in the back garden again: another two trips to get rid of the rubbish and rubble. Again, we had lunch at home, before heading out - in a different direction, and less ambitious than on Tuesday. We went to High Bradfield, then took various back roads and byways as we pottered along, via Holmfirth, in a vague kind of figure-of-eight.

And we got to Paris after all!!

On the outskirts of Holmfirth - perhaps it is a suburb of Holmfirth - there is a place called Paris! We drove through it, on Paris Road! And on Monday evening, when friends came to our place for dinner, I had deliberately bought a couple of bottles of French wine.

We covered about 45 miles of pottering about that Wednesday afternoon, and got back home something after 5 pm. Both of us were ready for a rest!

Before dinner, we made a quick trip to a DIY and garden centre, to buy a couple of new plants for the garden and 15 bags of top soil to go on the garden bed I had been working on. Then we had a quiet evening at home. Because we were " on holiday", we did not go in to a chapel event, but I have to admit that I spent time working on the next Sunday's service.

Thursday followed a similar pattern: working at home in the morning; two more trips to the dumpit site; then going out in the late afternoon, to potter over to Loxley and buy plants at the three nurseries on Loxley Road, followed by a pub dinner.

Apart from working on the service on Wednesday - when there was nothing on television that appealed to me - I did honour my holiday by not going in to the Chapel, for the three days, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. And it was a good break, and I got a lot done in the back garden, which I would not have done if we had managed to get to France. So, it was a good little holiday, even if it was not what we had originally planned.

Amos Bronson Alcott wrote:

> We mount to heaven mostly on the ruins of our cherished schemes, finding our failures were successes.

When I was choosing the hymns for the following Sunday's service, I looked through the index in the hymn book, Hymns for Living. There are only two listed under the theme of "Holidays" - Numbers 83 and 278. But they were not suitable because Number 83 is the Christmas and Hanukkah hymn "Our festival is here again", and Number 278 is the Midwinter hymn "Deck the halls with boughs of holly", with lots of fa la las.

I did think about Number 153, with its words "ne'er arriving", "success may never greet us", "all things seeming to defeat us", and "journeying down life's road".

And given that I had had a spate of funerals and memorial services, I was tempted to use Number 293, in the section "Seasons of Human Life". It begins

> No longer forward nor behind
> I look in hope or fear.

In the end we began the service with Number 28 by Bruce Findlow:

> The tides of the spirit have their ebb and flow
> And we must be patient and move as they go.

The second hymn was Number 49. It has the famous words of W H Davies:

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

Perhaps I had had a bit more time that previous week than I might have had if we had got to France and tried to fit in lots of tourist experiences.

And our unplanned few days were reflected in the third hymn, Number 254:

Let us wander where we will.

From Robert Fulghum's second book, It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It, two tales from the Sufi Muslim tradition, whose leaders are famous for their teaching stories - short anecdotes that seem light and simple at first telling, but that contain a seed of great wisdom:

**A** A famous religious teacher ... was passing through a small town. It was known that he carried with him the secret key to understanding the meaning of life. A certain pickpocket approached him, searched him with his talented fingers, found nothing, and turned away, empty-handed. All he had noticed were the pockets.

**B** A famous teacher was invited by a prince to go lion hunting. When he returned, he was asked how the hunt had gone. "Marvelous!" And how many lions did they find? "None - that is why it was so marvelous. "

On page 930 of The New York Times Almanac for the year 1970 there is the listing of the life-time batting averages of all the greatest baseball players. Ty Cobb, the greatest slugger of them all, had a life-time average of only .367. Even Babe Ruth didn't do so good. Ty Cobb: · .367. He got a hit once out of every three times at bat. He didn't even bat .500 - so what can you expect already?

Theology is amazing: holy books abound; my back garden was much clearer than it was a week previously.

And we-eventually got to Paris on the Eurostar chunnel train!

Amen.