

Lifting the cloud of limitation

For 12 days were gripped with 'Paralympic fever' in our house. We watched in awe at the skill, determination and fantastic achievements of more than 4000 Paralympic athletes from around the world. These men and women all have the challenge of a disability in their lives. A few that stood out for me include:

- Archer, Matt Stutzman (USA)- born without arms and used his feet and teeth to release his arrows. He won gold.
- China's Lu Dong, who has no arms, gripped a towel between her teeth so she could launch herself into the pool. She won silver
- Olivia Breen(GB), born with cerebral palsy, ran every race with real joy. She won a team bronze



These athletes have let us see that that all is possible – and why? Because they have shown us that they are just normal human beings. Yes, with their challenges, yes with their difficulties but with huge talent, huge spirit, great courage and self-belief.

Through the Paralympic games the world has been exposed to a very clear lesson in acceptance. In accepting each other as normal. One person's, 'normal' will be very different from the next, but we each have our gifts and we each have our limitations. It is the fusion of both of these elements that make us who we are. The paralympians have made us sit up, listen and delight in the fact that we are all unique. As Lord Coe said in his closing speech – the paralympic athletes have, 'Lifted the cloud of limitation.'

Clouds of limitation can exist in aspects of all of our lives. One such cloud of limitation in our spiritual journey is the negative images of God that we hold and how we think God perceives us. Many of us will carry such images of our relationship with God from our childhood. Indeed, these images may not have changed at all.

If asked what these childhood images of God were then one might answer – a judging God; a policeman God; a God who is male; a God you had to be good for. Sinless and pure for. A God who will turn you away if you are not good enough. For others it is a God who is distant and 'out there'. I am learning that if we remain holding onto these images of God and how God sees us, if we don't look beyond them, then we may remain in a place of limited growth. Within a cloud of limitation.

St Teresa of Avila tells us that:

'The greatest obstacle to spiritual growth is our refusal to let God change.'

The God who dreamed of us and created us so beautifully is a loving God who yearns for us to be who we are – ourselves. Not our perfect selves, just our normal selves. And because we are human we naturally come with our pains as well as our joys, our doubts as well as our hopes, our bitterness as well as our grace. We are all capable of creating turmoil as well as peace. I am very capable of all of these emotions but I am learning to accept that they are all part of who I am. They are not to be pushed aside and brushed off before we approach God. In fact it is right in the midst of the nitty-gritty of our lives that God is at her closest. Deep in the heart of it all. Calling us to change and develop and grow and blossom and flourish. Urging us to believe in our beautiful, complete selves.

How then do we allow this change, this development to take place?

I am convinced that each one of us needs time and a little space in our lives so that the presence of our own beauty can come near enough for us to recognise it. If we can begin to start to accept the beauty of all that we are – just as God does - then we are on the road to accepting and loving ourselves more fully, and being open to new thresholds. New possibilities. New ways of seeing and being in our relationship with God.

There could be no better place to start.