

## Daniel's reflection for week beginning February 19th – A God who never gives up on us

..  
He was a young man. He was crouched over the wet mud in the dug-up Market Place. Very intently, he was scraping away dirt from an embedded stone. In his hand was something that looked like a small spoon. Most of the stuff he would throw away but every now and then he paid special attention to some tiny fragment, placing it carefully to one side. 'Excuse me, what are you doing?' I ventured to ask him. Graciously he explained. 'I'm an archaeology student from Durham University,' he said, 'and I'm trying to find something of value here, something worth keeping.'

As I crossed the road I was smiling to myself. I was remembering the words 'something of value, something worth keeping.' In my mind's eye I saw myself, after I had died, thrown out of heaven by St Peter, as a piece of worthless scrap, unfit to live with the saints. Then I saw God running through the pearly gates, bending down over me, with a small spoon, like the university student in the Market Place.

So there was God, carefully sifting and scraping through my life, throwing away the dirt and the mistakes and the sins. I could hear God whispering, 'There must be something of value here; something worth keeping. Even if it kills me (again!), I'll find the golden part of Daniel, the shiny bit that is made in my own image. Even Daniel cannot destroy that!'

I was smiling because this image of God was not the one that I was brought up with. As a child I was told about a hard God who searched for my bad bits, not my good bits; a God of fear rather than of joy. I was smiling because I do not believe any more in a God who punishes – only in a God who loves and laughs and weeps. These days I only believe in a God who never, ever gives up on me.

And I also believe that there is nothing without its own strange beauty. Because existence means life, and life means God, then it must follow that there is something divine, even in the least attractive of things. For some reason I find these words of Ralph Emerson both amusing and reassuring:

Let me go where'ere I will  
I hear a sky-born music still:  
It sounds from all things old,  
It sounds from all things young,  
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,  
Peals out a cheerful song.

It is not only in the rose,  
It is not only in the bird,  
Not only where the rainbow glows.  
Nor in the song of woman heard,  
But in the darkest meanest things  
There alway, alway something sings.

'Tis not in the high stars alone,  
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,  
Nor in the red-breast's mellow tone,  
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,  
But in the mud and scum of things  
There alway, alway something sings.

*(Prism of Love pp25, 26)*