



JULY'S PASTORAL LETTER

Joan writes,

I love hearing and reading other peoples' stories. Often they help me to see my own life from a different perspective. They show us how love, loss and faith have shaped lives. I thought I would share two examples of stories I find inspirational.

I have just finished reading a biography of Gordon Brown. You may remember Gordon and Sarah's first child Jennifer was born 7 weeks prematurely, weighing only 2lbs and 4ozs. She had already suffered a brain haemorrhage and she died after ten days. Her parents sat with her every day as her life support was gradually withdrawn. During that short time they arranged for her to be baptised. They explained that this was not just, a comfort or a ritual; it was a recognition that every single life, even the shortest had a purpose and every person is irreplaceable.

Sarah added "It's always going to be painful and it's always a huge part of you. She's our precious little girl who lives in our hearts." Sarah received over 13000 letters and she replied to everyone who gave an address. She also set up a charity, looking at the causes and consequences of prematurity, as she felt determined that something should come out of all the unhappiness.

I met Alyn Haskey when I was teaching. An accident at birth left Alyn with cerebral palsy. He used a wheelchair, his speech was heavily slurred and he needed the help of an assistant to feed him and help him get around. He also had a wicked sense of humour, an able mind and an ability to challenge our perception of disability.

In his early twenties he had already gained two university degrees, a Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award and a place in the 1984 Paralympics squad – when he felt a call to ministry. He applied for a Lay Readership Course at St. John's College, Nottingham and was turned down. Failing to find a church willing to take him on in any ministry capacity, he set up a small trust and began work as an evangelist. I invited him to come and speak to some classes on coping with disability. He helped us to understand that many people who are physically handicapped have nothing wrong with their minds. Some years later he was to offer himself for ordination. Finally in 2004 he was ordained at Southwell Minster.

Not everyone was able to accept his ministry as his disability did impose some limitations but that reminds us that no-one offers a perfect ministry. His need of a carer to accompany him is a reminder to us of our dependence on the Body of Christ and is a good example of collaborative ministry.

Alyn's determination and zest for life was both infectious and inspiring. He said the greatest problem disabled people have is other people's reaction to them. He said, people are continually talking down to you, which is most frustrating – having to live with rejection, fear and prejudice. He said that it's not so much what they say – it's how they react. He ended by saying "Give us a chance to get to know you. Don't back away from us."

He wrote this poem entitled "Body Language":

You turn away and hide your face
questioning my role in the human race;
Limbs that are twisted, head never still.
No sign of intellect, mind or will.
You interpret the signs and put me in a box,
But I'm breaking out of your human locks,
The messages are there but in a different key,
It's not in my appearance that you'll find the real me.