

Thought for the Day, 3 July

'I'll labour night and day

To be a pilgrim.'

John Bunyan's famous pilgrim hymn is one we often sing with some fervour, although I sometimes regret that the tune encourages us to put undue emphasis on the second syllable ('to **be** a pilgrim'). It may be true that we do sometimes need grim determination to keep to the right path, but that isn't the complete picture of our pilgrimage! True, the term is somewhat loosely applied these days to what amounts to not much more than a pleasant day out to visit some place of interest, so maybe it is good to be reminded of the serious intent of a pilgrim's journey.

John Bunyan was born and lived in a village near Bedford in the seventeenth century. He was imprisoned for many years because of his refusal to stop preaching, but the town is nowadays proud to claim him as a famous son. When we were living there, our children were all set school projects about him, first in their Junior schools, and then again (how unimaginative!) in their newly instituted Middle schools. But even I, in my younger years and not in Bedford, was taught about him. I can still remember a poem that I wrote:

Christian started off one day

With a burden like a load of hay.

He fell into the Slough of Despond,

Which was a great big murky pond.

Well, I was only eight at the time!

Christian meets with many setbacks and hazards on his journey in *Pilgrim's Progress*. One such occurred as he approached the House Beautiful, where he hoped to find peaceful lodgings for the night. However, he was suddenly confronted by two pilgrims named Mistrust and Timorous running hard in the opposite direction. They urged him to turn with them because there were lions ahead. Poor Christian continued, but somewhat apprehensively. The path narrowed as it neared the house - but the porter on duty there told him not to fear, as the lions were chained. He still had to hold his nerve, and somehow pass them - and so he reached his destination.

It was while we were living in Bedford that I was caught up in a quite extraordinary situation, which was so awful that as I set off to work one morning my resolve failed me, and I stopped in my tracks, ready to turn round and return home. Suddenly those words leapt into my mind: *The lions are chained*, and somewhat fearfully I decided to continue. Sadly, it wasn't the House Beautiful that I was going to - but at least the lions didn't devour me. And fortunately, our pilgrimages do contain many peaceful and tranquil resting places on the way.

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