

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE

In many respects going on a retreat is an unusual thing for a Methodist to do. Methodist spirituality tends to be that of doing things, engaging in good works of various kinds, and, of course, the spirituality of hymn singing. Not only that, it is often assumed that retreats are for especially holy people, not for ordinary down to earth people like me. Why would anyone want to be quiet for so long? Anyway, there isn't the time. There is just so much to do, appointments to keep, meetings, shopping, cleaning, families to organise, a job to hold down..... the list is endless.

I wonder how God sees our lives? If God were to look at your life what would he see? I have no doubt that, some years ago, God was looking at mine and telling me to stop. That's why I found myself on a retreat. It was high time to spend some quality time with God. I have to admit the experience was a little bit scary because it was a silent retreat and it lasted 30 days! There were none of the usual distractions of everyday life – no music, newspaper, television, diary, phone calls, emails or knocks at the door, just one hour's conversation per day with my spiritual director. As I said, this was quality time with God. Above all else it was a time to be and not to do. We are, after all, human beings! This is an aspect of our spirituality which the psalmist wrote about but which we are in danger of losing. In the midst of turmoil the psalmist wrote 'be still, and know that I am God'. The quaker hymn writer, John Greenleaf Whittier, puts it very succinctly; 'drop thy still dews of quietness'. (Hymns and Psalms 673 verse 5)

The retreat followed the spiritual exercises of Ignatius although I hasten to admit I knew nothing at all about these exercises or about Ignatius. I was the proverbial lamb to the slaughter. The bottom line is that God knew what he was doing. He changed my life.

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