

## Listening to Advice

Four-thirty pm, and the last traces of the winter sun are disappearing over the horizon. It has been a bitterly cold day and the clear sky forecasts the temperature falling to minus 7 yet again during the night.

While the compacted snow and ice look beautiful and many children will be hoping that schools stay shut when the Christmas holidays end mid week - I am recounting one of the hottest and most beautiful days of our summer holidays.



Changed plans found us travelling south west to the Dorset coast instead of north to Scotland. Do you find it difficult to take up the offer 'you must come and see us – we've plenty of room'? We took up a couple of these offers to find the pleasure it brought not only to ourselves but to those we visited even if only for a chat over a cup of tea. Taking up these offers was very much part of God's plan over the summer. This wonderful day originated from the simple question 'Do you know a nice route to Lulworth Cove?'

We had spent the previous night with friends at Wimborne Minster. Before we left in the morning we met up with a friend of my son whom we had got to know well during his recovery from a stress-related breakdown. He had taken us for a sight-seeing walk and we were just coming to the end of chatting over a cup of tea. The previous evening's route finding had not been encouraging as I envisaged the traffic and built-up area we would have to travel through to reach Lulworth Cove. It dawned on me as we sat there - who better to know the best route than someone who had grown up in the area.

He directed to the eastern side of Poole harbour through Sandbanks – the homes of the rich and famous – to catch the car ferry across the harbour and join the coast road westwards.

There was far more to enjoy at Sandbanks than we could have imagined. On the right hand side a huge harbour – the top decks and funnels of the ships clearly visible – and on the left the sweeping curve of a beautiful sandy beach served by the cleanest car and coach parks, toilet and shower facilities, and alongside, the usual fast food shops selling all sorts of healthy options. The cleanliness of everything made quite an impression. What touched me most was the thoughtfulness towards the elderly and disabled. Easily accessible to those who relied on walking sticks or wheel chairs was a concrete slipway sloping gently to the water's edge and a small platform to park up. It also gave easy access to the firmer wet sand for the less infirm to enjoy a walk along the water's edge. I took full advantage of this wonderful simple walkway and, sandals in my hands, had the first walk for many years in the shallows.

The car ferry deposited us on the opposite bank and we were soon negotiating a twisting road to the top of the stunningly white cliffs. Once we had reached the highest point a viewing place gave us breath-taking views of the scene below. There were views of the Atlantic ocean to our right, miniature boats, the car ferry below in front of us, and to the left the water inlets of an enormous, busy harbour – while behind us lay the Purbeck hills and

cliffs.

We tootled along enjoying ourselves stopping whenever the scenery demanded it and eventually reached Lulworth Cove. We declined the urge to walk to Doodle Doors because it was so hot and enjoyed a cream tea instead and a much shorter walk to the cove. As we left for our usual retreat on Dartmoor we knew that we would be revisiting the Dorset coast.

This enjoyable day came about because I used someone else far more aware and knowledgeable than me. Not so a couple of weeks later, travelling home from a week up North. We had spent the final day sightseeing in the Yorkshire Dales and had called in for another one of those cups of tea and chats with a College friend living in Harrogate. Knowing that she often travelled to Norfolk I asked her if she could give us



the best route to the A1 which would be the most pleasurable as neither of us enjoy using the motorways unless we have to. The directions were simple, leading us directly eastwards with the assurance that we would enjoy the route.

A huge signpost appearing in front of us giving directions to the A1 North and South threw me and we turned to the left instead of keeping straight on as we were directed to. I realised almost immediately what I had done and my apologies for taking us off at a tangent were readily accepted as if there was nothing to apologise for. So we travelled north for a while, then east and eventually took the right hand entrance to the A1 and headed south for Norfolk, Suffolk and home.

I obviously had not let the directions register sufficiently to not be so easily distracted by the persuasiveness of those large signs. On two occasions I had asked if there was a better way yet I only listened to one properly. Perhaps one being at the start of a journey and the other part way made the difference. One was listened to with great anticipation of good things to come while the second was half-hearted. Who looks forward to going back if what is being left behind has been so good? What lies ahead might seem too much like hard work, or facing difficulties and pressures. The retreat, wherever it had been taken and for whatever reason, was coming to an end and perhaps that caused a reluctance within to apply one's self to the detail. My decisions affected the two of us as well – so often our good and poor choices do affect those close to us and unfortunately not with the harmonious outcomes we would have wished for. How important to be aware of details, to ask and not try to rely on our own resources and ultimately find out what God's plans are for us.

We made good time home and as a last treat enjoyed an unhealthy meal of fish 'n chips, bread and butter and a pot of tea sitting outside a pub in one of Norfolk's lovely market towns.

