

Meeting Eve

Recently my step son, his wife and their two children came to stay with us. Their eldest child is a little boy of rising three who talks incessantly and bustles about with great energy and curiosity. His sister is only a couple of months old, so she sleeps a lot, waking to feed and have her nappy changed, and just occasionally she sits in her bouncing chair and gazes at the world. Life goes on around her.

I felt that I'd like to get to know her better, so sometimes I would pick up her chair and balance it on my knee so that we were physically close. I looked at her, waited patiently, and hoped to make eye contact, usually with some success. Her eyes would focus and I found myself looking at her while she looked at me. If I smiled she would often smile back: sometimes she would smile first. She is starting to make sounds and I discovered that if I made sounds in response we got into what might be called a conversation, sometimes light-hearted, sometimes serious : making sounds to each other and both clearly enjoying the experience. She and I entered into a sort of communion together. It seemed as if soul was speaking to soul, and I felt that we got to know each other better than I would have thought possible. It was a joy and a delight!

If she became distressed then I would just gently place my hand on her and she would calm down almost immediately. The communication went beyond sounds.

None of this is very surprising. Any parent or grandparent will recognise what I am talking about. I must have done the same years ago when my daughters were small. But as I reflected on it, I realised that what she and I were engaged in is very like prayer. Might even be prayer? Me looking at God, God looking at me, and through my fumbling attempts at communication, and if I was patient and open, finding ourselves closer than I had imagined possible. This little girl taught me something quite profound.

You don't need a small child to do this of course, gazing intently at almost anything with the right intent, can take you into the same place. But it's so easy and simple that we mostly overlook the possibility, and fail to find or name the treasure that awaits us there.

Henry Morgan