

11<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## Awe

**“He [the emperor] is taller by almost the breadth of my nail than any of his court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into the beholders.”**

*Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels*

We all have our heroes. One of mine is the American singer/songwriter, Tom Paxton whose songs have been constant companions all my life. Through his skill with words and music, Tom Paxton has often articulated the deepest of my emotions and concerns. My first book, *A Need for Living*, published in 2001, took its title from one of his songs, *Pandora's Box*, for which he graciously gave me permission. Some months later, on a UK tour, he was to appear in Kirkcaldy. My wife and I got tickets, and I thought it would be a nice gesture to give him a copy of the book, duly signed by the author. So, after the concert, I made my way to the dressing room to meet my hero, and I was so in awe of the man I simply couldn't speak. I was shaking as I handed the book over, completely lost for words.

When Peter was with his friends on what we now know as the “Mount of the Transfiguration” where they saw Jesus transformed, he was tongue-tied too. He found his voice enough to blurt out, “Lord, we'll make shelters for you here, for you, and Moses, and Elijah.” But simply, he was in awe, starstruck, if you like, as I was in my hero's dressing room.

When we come face to face with the people we admire, it's no wonder we become tongue-tied, or to want to build shelters for our heroes on a mountaintop. They can, and do, “strike awe into the beholders”. These people – like Tom Paxton, or Elijah, or Moses – are still ordinary people. Yet we project onto our icons all that is good and wonderful – and awesome! But what was *really* happening was that Peter was face to face with the divine. His human reaction was to give “awesome” status to his heroes. But what he needed to do was to react in awe to the revelation of his Lord. If he'd grasped *that*, then being tongue-tied or saying nothing at all would have been just fine.

Silence and wonder in the presence of the divine is a more than appropriate response, wherever we realise we are in the presence of God.

### **A prayer for today**

*“O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,  
Consider all the works thy hand hath made ...”*

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