

11th October 2021

Beyond

**"Every spirit builds itself a house;
and beyond its house a world;
and beyond its world, a heaven.**

Know then, that the world exists for you."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature

We had a patient in the hospice whose name, "Robert", was boldly written on the sign above his bed. Conscious of not making assumptions of what name he wished to be known by, when I met him, I said, "I see your name is Robert. What name would you like us to use?" I was thinking, Rob, Bob, Bobby, Rab, Robbie, Bert, Bertie, or even Robert. I was surprised and delighted when he replied, "Actually, I'd like to be called Dr Cunningham."

To use Ralph Waldo Emerson's metaphor, what we saw of this man's spirit was a house, and that house had a name. But right at the moment, he'd opened up the possibility that there was a world beyond that house, and maybe even a heaven beyond that, a vista of existence for him that we knew nothing about, and that would be fascinating to get to know.

One day, Jesus was passing through the town of Jericho when he met a man called Zacchaeus who was a Tax Collector. But this was no HMRC official. This was a man in the pay of the Roman authorities, an agent of the occupying forces. This was the equivalent of a Mafia enforcer, making sure the protection money was paid on time. Zacchaeus was a social pariah, and a little man to boot, who, strange as it may seem, climbed a tree to get a better view of Jesus as he went through the town. And Jesus stopped below the tree and called Zacchaeus to come down. "Today, my friend, I will come to share food with you in your home." Right at that moment, Jesus had seen beyond a name, beyond a hatred, beyond a label, beyond a "house" people thought they knew. Jesus saw the world beyond and understood possibilities no one else was prepared to see.

Every spirit builds a house, and we can make assumptions about that. But if we go further, we can find the world beyond, and maybe the heaven beyond that. Who knows then what we might discover?

A prayer for today

*Lord, when I know I am called by name,
help me to see the world of new possibilities emerging. Amen*