

3rd September 2023

Battles

"Fierce may be the conflict."

Frances Ridley Havergal, *Who is on the Lord's side*

I wrote a hymn a while ago which I set to *Armageddon*, composed by Caroline Louise Reichardt in Germany in 1853. This tune is familiar to us from Frances Havergal's hymn, *Who is on the Lord's side?*, in an arrangement from 1871 by John Goss, organist at St Paul's cathedral. I'll share the words of my hymn with you tomorrow. But because of *Armageddon*'s association with battles at the end of time, and Havergal's use of the language of foes, service, loyalty, conflicts, enlisting, armies, soldiers and victory, it's not surprising that we're reluctant to utilize these metaphors nowadays, and, as a result, hymns such as this are seldom sung.

Yet are the images of battles not still appropriate in an understanding of our life of faith? I don't mean the metaphysical battle between a God and a Devil, or the glorification of war using images of suppression and destruction. But I suggest that the metaphors of conflict are still useful in understanding the battles in our own souls between right and wrong, facing ethical dilemmas, and our struggles to be righteous.

For many years in Scotland's *The Sunday Post*, there has been a cartoon strip of the antics of a small boy, affectionately named *Oor Wullie*. The escapades of young William are clearly designed to show that he represents every one of us, and many of the cartoon's stories are about the struggles in this boy's life to do good and avoid doing wrong. Sometimes, it goes one way; then it goes the other. In relationships, with friends, in family life, at play, in school, it is a constant battle.

Oor Wullie is often depicted – usually at the start or end of each comic strip – sitting on an up-turned bucket, ready for action at the start of a day, or contemplating the meaning of life at the end. And sometimes, as a sign that the storyline is to be about his inner conflicts, there is a little angel on one of his shoulders and a little devil on the other. Which way will he be pulled? Will he face triumph or disaster? What side will win?

Oor Wullie *is* all of us, at the start or the end of each day, or at any other time, facing the battle between doing right or wrong. The metaphor of conflict? Still there, and still relevant – as Oor Wullie knows all too well.

A prayer for today

Lord, in my battles to do right, I pray that good will win the day. Amen