

# Waiting for Dad

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Some of you may have been listening as I was yesterday morning to Radio 4's *Saturday Live* programme. Each week it gathers three or four studio guests to share a bit of their life story, sometimes around a broad theme: today's show was about *finding our calling in life*: Its guests all had something to share:

The soul singer PP Arnold discovered her talent as a little girl singing in church; singing enabled her to free herself from an abusive relationship and become a successful recording artist.

As a teenager a vicar, Peter Allen, used to climb the walls a Hillsborough, to get the opportunity to run on the hallowed turf of Sheffield Wednesday's ground. He even confessed to stealing some nets from the goals. Following a conversion experience working in a grocer's shop, he became a vicar and one day found himself as chaplain at, yes, Sheffield Wednesday.

Another guest was an Instagram poet Charly Cox, who discovered her talent with the help of her grandad and who read a beautiful poem about his role in comforting and reassuring her as a little girl when she was frightened by seaweed.

But the stand-out contribution came from Mackenzie Thorpe, an artist from Middlesbrough. He grew up in a working-class household, his father was like so many others in that he drank too much, but that didn't stop Mackenzie loving him (of which a little more later). Mackenzie really struggled at school, he is dyslexic, and schools of his day were not equipped to recognise this issue let alone provide any support, so he left without any formal qualifications. A series of hard manual jobs, in the shipyard, and iron foundry, one task was cleaning out large chemical tanks in which the fumes were so toxic he would often pass out. Mackenzie always considered himself an outsider, because the one thing that he persevered with was picture making, he remembers using stones to make pictures on paving slabs, he pinched his mother's lipstick just to draw on scraps of paper, he even drew in the rust on the chemical tanks he was sent to clean.

All the while, this outsider knew he was searching for something but couldn't work out what it was or how to go about it; he said in the interview *"what I was doing was going through life, knocking on every door that I could find, every avenue I could walk, because I knew that this was not the right one that I'm on"*. And so, the search went on, until he watched a film about the life of another outsider artist, Vincent van Gogh that unlocked

the puzzle. Over time he found a way to make art his life's work, and now he is one of the most sought-after artists in the UK.

He spoke on the programme about one of his most popular pieces which began as a painting and became a statue on the site on which his father used to work. It is a statue of two children, a brother and sister, and it's called *Waiting for Dad*. This has had a big impact locally because he wanted it to stand in recognition of all the workers who had lived and grafted in that place and in all hard industrial communities. To use his own words it's "*a monument to the working man, the people that built the bridges, the people that built these ships, the people that put food on our tables, and there isn't any, there's no acknowledgement of these people, they just get sacked like everybody else, or die.*" So it speaks for every child who has longed for more contact with their parents. And this is where Mackenzie spoke once more about his own Dad, who has long since died, and who he wishes could see his work, because he may be well on in years now, but he says "*I can't hold his hand, I can't touch him any more I can't my hand in his (he's) hand*", so he's is still the child who misses his dad and regrets all the moments he wasn't able to share with him, even the ones he didn't want to share. But he regards this piece as a monument to the fact that he is

still waiting and he believes if he waits faithfully, somehow his hope can still come true.

So, let me try and link this with today's gospel. Because Jesus talks about a narrow door and urges us to persevere in making our way through it; not to give up on the opportunity we have received by being able to call God our Father and ourselves as God's children. For there are things we do and thoughts we think that draw us away from that door every once in a while. Our faith can become narrowed by life's questions and struggles.

We are all outsiders at times, not quite knowing where our heart lies and how best to find our way. But that is not the issue in the gospel. It's the giving up that becomes the problem, because we are giving up on ourselves as well as on the trust we are invited to place in God's fatherly kindness, mercy and love. Continuing to seek our hearts' desire is like the children on the dockside or at the factory gates, we long even for a glimpse of our Father, we are keeping the door ajar and we will find our way through.