

Weekly Grace — (compiled by your Chaplain)

## Feeding Our Longing

From: <https://nuakh.uk/2023/02/02/feeding-our-longing/>

*Have you ever felt like there was more to life than this? Known some sense of longing for the future?*

Perhaps you've enjoyed a great steak or roast done exactly how you like it, or a really lovely pastry, or the absolute delight of seeing your roses bloom. The memory of that enjoyment is delightful, and yet it isn't the same as the actual pleasure you experienced. The pleasure doesn't last, it's fleeting. Maybe that makes you lift your head and wonder—and *long*—for a day when delight lasts.

Or perhaps you've wondered if everything should be more intense than it is? I'm profoundly colourblind. Apparently, I only see in a spectrum of grey and brown, though my experience is wonderfully vibrant. I'm told that the world is much more intense than I know, though have no way of accessing that level of reality. Maybe something one day shook you and made you wonder if there are colours that only the angels can see. I'm pretty sure there are. Maybe that makes you lift your head and wonder—and *long*—for a day when the browns are bright, burned, blue.

The great writer on joy and longing, C. S. Lewis, tells us in a famous passage from *The Weight of Glory* that we are far too easily pleased. We do not know what the Lord is offering us, what joy is available to us in God.

Lewis argued, especially in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, that we find our way to joy by longing. He liked to describe it with the German word *sehnsucht*, a sort of yearning for a joy we don't yet know, a nostalgia for a place we haven't been. He encountered it first in the Norse Myths but then was haunted by it, until he eventually relented to the call of Jesus and found that his *sehnsucht* could be met with the joy of participation in the Living God.

The Poet R. S. Thomas wrote to capture the Welsh idea of *hiraeth*, a homesickness that in Thomas' hands was not for the Welsh hills but for an eternal home we have not yet known that he especially saw glimpses of in the mystery of the sea.

That's what I mean by longing, this yearning or homesickness for a place we've never been to, that is the ground of joy. We have to thirst in order to drink. We have to yearn in order to find our fulfilment in the Triune life of God.

**Learning to Long**

How do we long? That ache you experience when you see beauty that makes something down at the bottom of your soul tremble, *that's* longing.

Perhaps when you see a truly majestic tree, with arms outstretched to the heavens in prayer, and your breath is caught at the tree's strength and age. Perhaps when you contemplate Rembrandt's *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* with its masterful capturing of emotions and dramatic movement—or your horror when you consider it's been missing for years since it was stolen and is unlikely to surface again. Perhaps when you see a masterful shot on goal that makes your heart ebullient, or when you see three arrows in a row in the ten ring and your jaw drops at the audacity of it. Perhaps when you hear the lyrical delight of Bach's *Cello Suite No. 1* or the ecstatic ingenuity of the guitar in Jimi Hendrix's *All Along the Watchtower*.

Or, most clearly for me, when I see the sky and consider that the Lord painted this just for me. It may be completely different things for you, but where do you perceive beauty that makes your soul ache? That ache, that's what we call longing or *sehnsucht* or *hiraeth*.

If you want to know joy then *feed it* and know that true beauty is coming. A time is coming when these fleeting flutters will be transformed into lasting joy - like hearing a roadie sound check an instrument compared with hearing your favourite band in full concert.

Beauty trains our hearts for joy. Longing is the ground of joy. So, what good things are you doing today to feed your longing?