76. The Cat and the Snake

I have seen several small snakes near our Malakal house recently. I would guess there are also some big ones and they have seen me! Normally each would give the other a wide berth. Not so our cat. No-one knows the origin of this cat other than it turned up around our house and has formed a mutual bond with us. I was intrigued to witness its confrontation with a snake. Some photos are attached. My guess is that the cat won as it was okay later and there was a dead snake! Cats can be kind of helpful that way if you like to keep snakes at a distance.

Our cat at Riimenze is a very good rat catcher – sharp-eyed, patient and persistent. It knows when to wait and when to pursue its prey. The world of nature achieves a balance between avoidance behaviour and confrontation. Most of the time, natural enemies stay out of harm’s way by successfully avoiding predators; but occasionally there is confrontation. In South Sudan, it is common to see play confrontation as goats endeavour to headbutt each other into submission. Unlike the cat and the snake, neither goat gets seriously hurt but the ritual is performed and both seem satisfied. Two equals can headbutt harmlessly but confrontation between unequals can have a deadly outcome for the weaker.

Perhaps it is similar with people. Politicians headbutt lots of the time. I don’t really understand why. To me it puts them on a similar level to goats. Mostly it is between equals and maybe no real harm appears to be done. But I would vote for any member of parliament who rises above the sneering, verbal abuse and name-calling that is common in parliament – call it by the nice name of ritual confrontation - and who consistently acts with respect for the dignity of every other human being. As people, we need to think clearly about what we value and what causes us outrage. People can act with deliberate judgement, not just with animal instinct.

I read an article recently in the Australian media that made a very sharp observation: There can be no better proof that people care more about brown cows than they do about brown people than the reaction to last week’s report on the massacre’s in Sri Lanka. Last month, a TV program broadcast distressing scenes of slaughter in an Indonesian abattoir. The outrage was immediate, with letters’ pages across the nation full of violent denunciations of the appalling way the beasts were treated….

On the same programme a few weeks later, viewers were shown naked and blindfolded men being shot in the head with assault rifles, the bodies of murdered rape victims, hospitals awash with the blood of civilians bombed in apparent safe havens and the bodies of men who had surrendered to the Sri Lankan Government after being offered amnesty, but then been murdered. The writer commented: It was one of the most horrific pieces of television I have ever seen. Yet, he observed: All week only one letter appeared in any Melbourne newspaper denouncing the slaughter and demanding the perpetrators be brought to justice.

Maybe in our first world comfort we simply avoid thinking about the problems in far away places like Sri Lanka - or South Sudan. The people of this country have seen too much war but it has helped them to form judgements about what is important and what it is they really want. The ordinary people of South Sudan
don’t have much by way of possessions but they know what they value. They celebrate the gift of life with sharing, kindness and respect for one another. The crucible of war and confrontation has given them strength of soul, a hearty resilience. Where others might despair, they find a way to survive and rejoice.

It is good to be kind to people and gentle with animals as well – although there may always be some we want to avoid. I unashamedly prefer a purr from our cat to a hiss from a snake and, mostly, we need more purring and less hissing from our leaders. But even Jesus showed outrage to the money lenders in the temple. There are times when we should be upset at what happens to others and there are times to confront rather than avoid. Human beings are gifted with judgement. Let us use it well.

Br Bill
Learning to knit

Joana with newborn

Teaching knitting

Volunteer Fija & refugees

Watching Yambio independence