

Happy Harry

I first met Harry several months ago when he came in for counselling.

My first impression was that he was always smiling.

As I learnt more of Harry's story I wondered why.

He was the last born of four children.

At birth he experienced difficulties which resulted in a lack of oxygen reaching his brain.

This had several results.

Harry was tall for his age but rather overweight.

He suffered significant hearing loss and consequently was fitted with two hearing aids.

This meant he had a rather flat and high pitched voice, which was not always easy to understand.

Harry encountered learning difficulties which caused him to perform poorly at school.

When I met Harry he had just turned 12.

He came to counselling for many reasons – he was regularly bullied at school, he found it difficult to make friends and so was a loner, and his family was his sole source of support and friendship.

On top of everything else, his dad had walked out on Harry and his mum.

The father took the older children with him, saying he could be proud of them because they were good looking and successful.

But he left a note for Harry's mum saying that she could keep "the retard" as he had no use for him.

Harry was his mother's sole support as she struggled to deal with the break-up of the family.

His father chose to make no contact with Harry, and kept his siblings from getting in touch, claiming it was best for all of them to make a fresh start.

And so, with his mother temporarily crippled by grief, Harry seemed to be all alone.

Despite all these disadvantages, Harry maintained a positive, optimistic outlook.

Harry shared his story with me, with little apparent self pity.

Instead his concern seemed to be firstly for his mother, then for his siblings, and even for his father.

He talked of how he felt and what was happening in his unusual, unmusical voice.

Yet, every so often, he would throw in a comment which took me by surprise.

"I'm a very fine young man," he would tell me.

"I'm really good at making people laugh," he told me on another occasion.

As the sessions passed, I found myself looking forward to each new statement which revealed a little more of Harry to me.

"I'm generous," he would tell me.

"I have a very loving heart."

I was intrigued.

It would be unusual to find this level of healthy self esteem in many children of Harry's age, but given his circumstances, it was extraordinary.

At last, I could not contain my curiosity any longer.

“Harry, it’s so wonderful to hear you talk about yourself in this way. How have you learnt all these things about yourself?”

“From my Mum,” Harry said straight away.

“She knows me better than anyone, so I know that everything she tells me about myself must be true.”

I had to sit in silence for a moment to absorb the wonderful simplicity of Harry’s words.

He knew he was loved, totally, unconditionally, and without question.

That one simple fact made sense of his world, even when everything around him seemed to be falling apart.

I realised that Harry had discovered the truth that many of us miss in life.

And yet, we all have that same sacrificial, non-judgemental love available to us.

God guaranteed that when he gave his perfect, sinless son Jesus Christ, to die in our place.

We were all disadvantaged and disabled by our sin.

We desperately needed someone would see beyond our outward appearance, our weaknesses, and our circumstances, and who would discern the true potential to love and be loved, within us.

Like Harry, we can say “my heavenly Father knows me better than anyone, so I know that everything He says about me is true.”

As we take this bread and this cup, we acknowledge that we need Jesus’ sacrifice to make us acceptable and loved.