

# October 2018



Dear Friends,

On 30<sup>th</sup> September we will have celebrated Harvest where, as one of Harvest songs says, “**All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin.**” Autumn is the time for the leaves on the trees to turn brown and fall and for the flowers in the garden to fade and die; it seems as if we are in for a bleak time as we prepare for winter. My son Matthew has been working as a gardener since leaving college and he says that the autumn and winter are some of the busiest time for gardeners; although they stop mowing lawns, they spend much of their time clearing gardens readying for the spring planting and growth. Autumn and winter must come and it seems like everything in a garden comes to a stop and is on hold, but this is only to prepare for the new growth and flowering of spring and summer.

Our Christian lives are like this too. There are seasons of life when it is all fine and we seem to be growing and flourishing. But there are also times when things seem to go wrong in relationships, work or in our church life and we feel bereft of the comfort our faith once brought us. C.S. Lewis, in his book “The Screwtape Letters”, talked about peaks and troughs in the Christian life, and said that in fact we learn more in the troughs than in the peaks, because it is in the troughs that our faith is tested and we are forced again to trust God even though we do not feel like it.

The Psalms are a great resource to us, showing us how the Jewish people were inspired to worship and pray. Some of the psalms are psalms of ‘orientation’- things are right between the psalmist and the world and God. Others are psalms of ‘disorientation’, where things are going wrong and the psalmist is upset at other people, and at God for allowing it to happen. But other psalms are psalms of ‘re-orientation’, the psalmist has been through a bad time and questioned God, but now he has come to see that God has come through for him in the end, in a way he could not have imagined, and the psalmist has grown in his faith as a result.

Our hymns and songs can inspire us today, especially if they are written by a person who has experienced pain and suffering and has known God’s blessing and comfort as a result. A Hymn that is often sung at funerals (and FA Cup finals!) is ‘Abide with me.’ It can become too familiar by over-use, but the reason it is so popular is that it accords with the reality of human life as described by the Psalmist:

a) The orientation

**Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;**

**The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide;**

**When other helpers fail and comforts flee,**

**Help of the helpless, O abide with me.**

I know God’s love and I cry out to God and trust in His presence.

Contd....

b) The disorientation

**Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.**

I can see death approaching in myself and others, and see the futility of life as all around me decays, and I cry out to God.

c) The re-orientation

**Reveal Thyself before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies,  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;**

In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

I have held on in faith, and in the midst of my pain-mental and physical, I have known God beside me giving me new strength and hope.

If we believe that our Christian lives are going to be on a 'level playing field' all our lives then, in my view, we are in for a lot of heartache and disappointment with God. If, however, we accept that life has its ups and downs, its seasons of growth and cutting back and accept each part of life as a gift from God, then we can face whatever happens with the knowledge that God will be with us always, until the end of time.

As the poem says:

**Not 'til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly,  
Shall God unroll the canvas  
And explain the reason why.**

**He knows, He loves, He cares,  
Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives His very best to those  
Who chose to walk with Him.**

**The dark threads are as needful  
In the Weaver's skillful hand,  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.**

In Christian love

Paul