

The Parish of Hipswell



A Vicar's Reflections...

I hope you are enjoying the fine weather, and managing to get out into it a bit each day? It has been such a blessing to see so much of the sun recently! The tulips are looking glorious still, the grass is growing fast, and it was lovely to see our resident hedgehog sunbathing yesterday in St Cuthbert's churchyard in Colburn!

I also hope that you are managing to find some comfort in your prayers and times of reflection.. Many years ago, I stayed overnight with a wonderful couple, Peter & Dorothy Millar, who were running a B&B in a large rambling country house in the Highlands of Scotland. It was designated a 'Columban House' (after St Columba), linked to the Christian community on the Scottish Island of Iona. Peter is ordained in the Church of Scotland, and he and Dorothy (a pathologist) had worked for years with the United Church of South India. Guests at the B&B were invited to join them in their daily prayers, in the style of Celtic spirituality (long before it became popular!), and to buy fairly-traded goods from India and elsewhere. They also produced a series of little booklets of daily reflections, one of which I found again just the other day: *'Notes for a Pilgrim - Daily Thoughts from a Columban House'*. There have been a number of quotations and short reflections from here which have really challenged or moved me. You might just appreciate some of these, too. The first quotation is very relevant to us during the present *Covid-19* crisis:

'When I look round at all the poverty and injustice, I say, "Thank God I am not God!" But when I remember that in every place of brokenness there are caring men and women, I say to myself, "Thank you, God, that you are God!"
(Desmond Tutu, former Archbishop of Cape Town, SA.)

During the last few days, I've found myself in fairly sombre mood (despite the glorious weather), reflecting on the bizarreness of the present situation - where nature is thriving and so much appears peaceful; yet people are suffering and dying every day, tended by those who are putting their very lives 'on the line' to do so. Perhaps there are meant to be times in our lives, like now, when we finally realise that we simply cannot control everything, or keep everything 'just so', however much we may long to be able to do so. These are times when we discover, perhaps, that - however 'un-religious' we might feel ourselves to be - we do need to draw our hope and strength from beyond ourselves. It is at times like this that we do well to admit our need to God, and to start (if we haven't begun already) to pray - in earnest.. Wonderfully, though, as *Julian of Norwich* put it so beautifully, *'We have been loved by God from before the beginning'*, and Jesus promises us that His love for us is enough to *see us through*..

Antony de Mello is now a well-known spiritual writer. Half a life-time ago, he wrote:

'I was neurotic for years. Anxious, depressed, selfish. And everyone kept telling me to change. And I resented them, and agreed with them, and wanted to change, but simply couldn't, no matter how I tried. I felt powerless and trapped. One day, God said: "Don't change! I love you as you are.." These words were music to my ears. I relaxed. I came alive. And suddenly I changed!'

Kathy Galloway, former Warden of the Iona Community, reflecting on our need at times like this not simply to go rushing about, but to take the time to pray and wait on God, reminds us of the need to be hopeful, in anticipation of a new move of God's Spirit in this land. During this Easter Season of the Church's year, we could do much worse than to heed her words, and really to be praying for God's Spirit to move among us with power once again:

'Pentecost did not happen the day after Easter. Perhaps resurrection takes a bit of getting used to. Instead, the disciples waited and prayed. And suddenly without warning, they were filled with power, at a time like this, filled with huge preventable suffering, we look for the freeing of the Spirit. We pray for the peace [and healing] of the world. We ask, give us a Pentecost again. And, like the disciples, we cannot predict where or when or how the Spirit will move among us. But we can wait in hope and readiness, open to [his] coming.'

Finally, I love *this* translation of these words of Jesus' to his anxious disciples at their *Last Supper* together (as relevant to us now, as it was for them on that fateful evening):

"I am leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile, like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid."

May you really experience God's deep and healing peace, now and always.