

Waiting

Who here likes waiting?..... Not many of us I imagine if the kids in church last week were anything to go by. I was in charge of the 'Patience' activity station, and whilst the children planted seeds I asked them about waiting. The only thing they found it easy to wait for was..... school; most other things, like sweeties, lunchbreak, their dinner, Christmas and downloading apps, were extremely hard to wait for.

As adults, I guess we are similar; impatient to receive rewards, breaks and goals, and perhaps ambivalent about waiting when anticipating bad news or living anxiously in difficult circumstances..... So do we even want to get better at waiting? It seems to be an unfashionable thing; we (or I) often do things just to get to another thing; always in a hurry, always trying to work things out and make things happen.

But if this is the only way we know how to be, how will we ever find any peace?..... how will we ever find ultimate meaning in our lives?..... how will we ever be able to face disease, old age, infirmity, loss of our precious independence and even death, with any equanimity?

This time last year Abby and Stephen were eagerly anticipating the birth of beautiful Eliza....; although they knew they still had six months to wait, they had evidence of progress as scans came and went and Abby's waistline grew. They also knew that this time of waiting was necessary for their baby to grow and develop and be fully ready for her birth. All this helped them to wait patiently, and when Eliza arrived safely in May they knew it had all been worth it.

For Mary and Joseph, it must have been harder to wait so calmly; we know that when Gabriel first went to Mary and told her about the child she was to have, she said 'how can this be?'; - she was very young, unmarried and a virgin - but when the angel assured her of God's total presence and involvement she accepted it, and did not as far as we know, lie awake at night stressing about practicalities and consequences.

Joseph, unsurprisingly, took the news even worse. He was all for breaking off the engagement and having no more to do with Mary... until he also was visited by an angel in a dream. These must have been powerful experiences to bring about such peace of mind..... Is it possible for us to have such an experience or reach such levels of trust?

In recent years there has been a rediscovering of a practice known as Contemplation which is not reflective, spontaneous or asking prayer, but is simply a resting in God - or the Creator Spirit if you like - beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. In this it has some similarities with the meditative practices taught in eastern spirituality.

By choosing to be still and silent, and using simple methods such as focusing on a single word like Jesus, Spirit, Listen or Peace, or by attending to our breathing, our senses quieten..... we become more open to the presence and flow of the Great Spirit, and for him, (or it, or her!), to work in us....

In this process we may start to let go of our anxious thoughts, our preoccupation with control and our destructive patterns of behaviour. We also begin to experience real peace.... and this is what we call Grace.

God gives us this Grace freely, because he longs for all of us to have abundant life full of joy, love, tears and laughter, work, play and relaxation and without fear. As we learn to enter in to this force-field we will also develop an increasing capacity for compassion, forgiveness and letting go of almost everything as we first imagined it to be.....

It is a hard thing to do at first because it is so alien to many of us but in church last week Tim was manning the 'Peace' station in the chancel, here behind me, and he got the children to do something very similar; to get comfortable, still and quiet and to focus on their breathing and become aware of the peace of God within them. Some were on cushions and beanbags or in the hammock, but all were overcome by this peace, and one or two actually fell asleep – now that is resting in God for youand Jesus did say that we should become like small children!

If you are interested in any of this then I would encourage you to look up Contemplation; I saw an App about Centering Prayer, which is a very similar thing, on the Contemplative Outreach website. Or there are many books about it; by the way - you don't need to be Christian or religious to do this - it is for everyone.

A word also for those who find it impossibly hard to be still, perhaps because of upsetting or disturbing thoughts or feelings that arise; this can be your body's way of telling you there are things you should be attending to; maybe past experiences which need to be dealt with; if this is so then try and find someone who can help you with them – a counsellor or spiritual director may be good starting places.

The most vital thing of all is to know yourself to be loved by God; try saying God's words from Mark's gospel as if to you; 'You are my beloved son/daughter; with you I am well pleased'. This in itself can be really hard to do and believe at first, but remember that it is true and that God is infinitely patient and loving with us, no matter what we have done in our lives.

I guess that Mary and Joseph were fairly practiced at this, which is what enabled them to wait so calmly for the momentous events that would unfold and change history forever. The good news is that we can all enter into this grace and peace, and in doing so learn first of all to trust in the goodness and love of God the Creator, and secondly, learn to wait..... enjoying and experiencing fully all the moments we are given,

and knowing that the process of becoming all that we were created to be is just as important as the arriving.

I'd like to finish with a poem;

As swimmers dare to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain freefall,
and float into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns that allsurrounding grace.

Amen

Amber Middlemiss