

Pastoral Letter 21st January

Dear friends,

Who goeth in the way which Christ hath gone,
Is much more sure to meet with him, than one
that travelleth by-ways:
Perhaps my God, though he be far before,
May turn, and take me by the hand and more
May strengthen my decays.

This verse, from one of George Herbert's famous poems, which is simply given the title 'Lent', opens up to us maybe an even greater awareness that our lives can also be likened to being on a journey, filled with different paths and roads to take.

The poem is written in such a way as it can almost itself be read like it's on a journey. Whilst acknowledging the by-ways as it goes, it moves from one place to another. Ultimately, I'd suggest, it's a poem that has at its heart the idea of Christian hope; the hope that God will take us by our hand and lead us in the journey of our lives.

Whilst visiting the bookshop at Salts mill, which is in a large former textile mill in Saltaire in Bradford, a few years ago now (that also has a fabulous Art gallery showing some of David Hockney's work) I came across a small book of Persian poetry. I opened it up and the very first poem had the title 'Open your hand so that you can be held.' It was a poem that was all about the time when as children we might often opened our hands, to find the safety and support of maybe our mother or fathers hand, or the hand of someone who cared for us, to hold our hands as we walked along. It gradually described how, as we travel along the journey of our lives, the roles might sometimes reverse and we become the one offering our hand to others to hold.

As we journey in our lives, individually and together as a church family, we might want to call to mind in our thoughts and prayers maybe a few people who we know; friends, neighbours or relatives, each day as we travel towards the season of Lent, who might find comfort and strength in opening their hands and hearts so that they might be held by God in their lives. For them to come and see how God can bring us hope, even when our life journeys might not be going so well.

I pray this day that you will know God's presence and hand to guide you, as it's described in a verse from one of my favourite hymns;

Lead us, heav'nly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but thee;
Yet possessing ev'ry blessing
If our God our Father be.

Love & prayers
Revd Neil