

February 2023: Spring spiral

This year, I have been eagerly watching our lawn to see when the spring bulbs come up, and tiptoeing carefully across it to avoid stepping on them when they do.

Last year, following an example we saw in stones in a wood near Symond's Yat, we decided to build a labyrinth on the vicarage lawn, using spring bulbs to mark the path. Historically labyrinths appear across many cultures, and pre-date Christianity by at least 2000 years. Throughout Christianity they have been used as a spiritual tool to help contemplation. Although we usually think of labyrinths and mazes as being the same, historically a Christian labyrinth is very different from a maze, having only a single path, leading to a centre. As one Christian author puts it, "A maze is designed to make you lose your way, while a labyrinth is designed to help you find your way."* The labyrinth we have built is as simple as it can be; just one spiral path leading inwards to the centre. The outer part of our spiral was planted last spring, when the bulbs we planted had leaves. The remainder was planted in the autumn, when the spring bulbs were no longer visible. So as I write this, we are waiting to see how accurately the second part of the spiral lines up with the first part!

Why, you might reasonably ask, do we want a giant spiral of spring bulbs, 12 metres across, on the lawn? Well, partly we were moving some of the bulbs from elsewhere and didn't want to throw them out. Partly it's our idea of fun. Partly we wanted to plant more bulbs anyway, to support pollinators. And partly because we want to use the labyrinth for its traditional Christian purpose. Last year I could walk two and a half circuits of the spiral before the bulbs ran out. This year it will be more, I hope. And that very slow walk early each morning, will be an opportunity for me to engage deliberately with world around me, taking time to notice things that perhaps I wouldn't usually notice, taking time to ponder and to pray in a different way from usual, before I begin my day.

Of course, a labyrinth or even a prayer walk is not for everyone. But I do think that we can all benefit from times that we deliberately set aside; times to step outside our usual routines or busyness; to look, to ponder, to allow thoughts and questions to surface about what is truly important in life. So my prayer for us all this month is that we will all find time to enjoy whatever is our equivalent of a labyrinth. And if you want to try out the vicarage labyrinth, please give me a call.

Yours in Christ,
Louise Petheram
rev.louise.p@gmail.com 01433 621918

*Lauren Artress, from *The Sacred Path Companion*

If you would like to sign up to receive the regular newsletters from churches and Christian groups across Hope Valley, please go to
<https://mailchi.mp/f29b1286b3df/2t1gk3uwy2>
or email me and I can sign you up.