

## September 2023: Endings and beginnings

Very soon I know we will be delighted again by the sound of young children playing in the Infant School and preschool playground next door. For many, the start to the new school year is a reminder that summer is almost over, and autumn will soon be here.

All of my life I have treasured the regularly changing pattern of the seasons. Throughout the year, as the seasons change, it always seems to be the arrival of spring and of autumn that I am most aware of. Spring brings only excitement as I watch out for each new sign of dormant ecosystems awakening. In autumn my feelings are more mixed. There are many, many things I enjoy about autumn; harvest, looking out for fungi in our garden and further afield, colder nights and crisp, cold mornings, autumn colours and scuffing through fallen leaves, to name but a few. But autumn also brings me feelings of loss, as trees drop their leaves and plants die back for winter. And whilst cold weather in winter is unlikely to be a threat to me, I know that the approach of winter brings anxieties and very real problems for many.

I know that one of the reasons I appreciate the turning of the seasons, is that they keep me firmly in touch with the cycle of life. They keep me firmly in touch with my own mortality, anchoring me to a 'bigger picture' and reminding me that both death and loss are a natural part of our lives. Indeed, very few of us will go through life without experiencing all kinds of loss; through bereavement, illness, loss of independence, poverty, unemployment, broken relationships, or simply the loss that comes from moving to somewhere new and unfamiliar. The list goes on and on.

How we respond to loss, and how we receive when we need to, is vital to our well-being. Our churches are often not very good at talking about loss, or about receiving, perhaps because we find these difficult. Yet about a third of the gospels is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life, to the time when Jesus accepted all the suffering that was inflicted on him, giving up control, well-being, and even life itself. It has regularly been argued that the most important part of Jesus' life was when Jesus – God – identified himself with the vulnerable and suffering, standing alongside every victim ever of misfortune or circumstance. Personally, I know that I find it much easier to worship a God who knows about autumn and winter, than one who doesn't!

And so my prayer for us all this month is that we are able to show our care for one another in how we receive as well as in how we give, so that, as one of our church prayers puts it, our endings are new beginnings.

Yours in Christ,  
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