



Keeping hope alive during times of change

Change is rarely comfortable or "plain sailing ". It involves an ending (so some measure of loss needs to be acknowledged) and a beginning (scary even if exciting). This is so even when the change in question is of our own choosing or welcome. These last few months have involved changes for us all, mostly not of our own choosing or welcome! And certainly not envisaged a year ago!

What a blessing that we don't know what the future holds for us in advance. In my next reflection, I shall discuss the benefits of living more in the present. For now, we'll just say that not constantly replaying videos of the past, in our minds, or of anticipating what the future may be like is more of a challenge during times of change and uncertainty.

During these times we flounder for what we can still hold on to, as if we're drifting on a raft on the open sea and looking for a rock where we can safely anchor.

The past few months have taken away many of our usual "anchor points" -- going to church to worship and meet our fellow Christians and seeing our families and friends. Some have also lost the security/ anchor points of jobs, regular income, health and even loved ones. Add to this the effects of climate change and the likely problems that Brexit will bring -- our lives will never be the same as they were. Radical change is inevitable and will affect us all "big time".

How can we handle these radical changes in our lives more positively? What can our anchor points be now? What is potentially fearful CAN creatively be transformed into that which is good, that is our gospel-- the good news and God's intentions always.

Consider Jacob in the Old Testament. Several times he "wrestled for a blessing ". He (1) jostled with his twin, Esau, in the womb (2) deceived his father, Isaac, to get Esau's birth right (3)fled to Padan - Aram and had the vision of a ladder to heaven (4) with Laban, he "wrestled" for a wife and wealth, and (5) he wrestled with a man who was actually God. It's well worth rereading these stories in Genesis ch25-32, we can learn much.

The 5th occasion he wrestled for a legitimate blessing. He was alone with God, having come to the end of himself. God does indeed bless him and changes his name, as he also did with Abram/ Abraham, Simon/Peter, and Saul/ Paul when He blessed them. No longer called Jacob, deceiver, his new name would be Israel, because he had wrestled with God.

When we're over faced by our circumstances, how much do WE trust God with them? Can we "wrestle for a blessing" with God, acknowledging our complete dependence on Him? Can we take Him at His word and trust that He WILL work all things for our good? (Romans8). Can we "be still and KNOW that He IS God and a very present help in time of trouble"? (psalm 46). Can we dare to believe that "He will change OUR name, so we will no longer be called wounded, outcast, lonely or afraid, but our new name will be confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one--- faithfulness, friend of God, one who seeks His face" (Isaiah 62:2-4)?

Countless numbers of people, over the centuries, have turned to God when they've come to the end of their own resources to cope with life and found that He IS the solid rock where they can anchor. They've found that His word IS true and life- giving as He's given them strength and courage to embrace the changes in their lives. Hope and fear cannot co-exist. So how can we nurture our own sense of hope at this time?

- (1) We can recollect the times when God has been faithful to us in the past
- (2) Reading scripture, we can see so much evidence of God's faithfulness to not only bring people through their trials but to bring good out of them, too.
- (3) Remember that "this, too, will pass"- more on this in my next reflection
- (4) Ask God what we can learn from our trials, rather than just resisting them ?
- (5) Look for the good things arising out of all this and give thanks.
- (6) Make a list of helpful scriptures and quotations to draw on in darker moments
- (7) Similarly, jot down words of some hymns or songs that will help change our focus when we feel we're "sinking"
- (8) Reach out to others, in whatever way you can, in so doing we are always blessed ourselves.
- (9) Always praise God and worship, however things are for you, for He is always at work and He never change nor fails us.

This waiting time IS painful, like a woman's labour pains before giving birth, it can feel like it will go on forever! But this time will pass and one day WE will give birth to a new tomorrow. "He who led us into the wilderness, there to speak to us face to face", Hosea2:14, WILL "strengthen and help us and enfold us in His peace", Ps29:11. While we wait, we KNOW that God has "plans for us, always working for our good...to give us a future and a hope..and along the way, will give us treasures in the darkness, riches hidden in secret places..."(Jeremiah 29:11,Rom8:28, Isaiah 45:3).

So, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (psalm 34:8) , take Him at His word and "you will never be disappointed", Romans 5:5, "He will not fail you", Joshua 1:5. In fact " those who trust in the Lord, will renew their strength and rise with wings like an eagle's " Isaiah 40:31. So, we don't need to be vulnerable to being dragged down by our circumstances. We CAN keep our hope alive as we continue to pray for each other. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, we WILL embrace the future. He, who is faithful, is with us NOW and ALWAYS. ALLELUIA!

Nona Harrison.