

Sunday 6th September



New Beginnings

Children returning to school, people encouraged to go back to work, churches reopening - is this a time of new beginning?

As a child at the start of a new school year, I loved all the new exercise books, with that special paper-smell and their spotless pages. I don't think I was alone in making a resolution to keep the books special: neat, free of crossings-out and blots (I am old enough to remember pens you dipped in ink!). And if we didn't think it ourselves, the teacher suggested the idea, forcefully. How long did the resolution last? I don't know about you, but in my own case not long at all, but then the tension of trying to do my very, very best writing somehow seized up my hand and it became almost my worst writing . . . honestly!

Much as we long for it, a new beginning can never be fully that, because we bring ourselves to it, with all our imperfections. Our past influences our present and our future.

So, as churches reopen with services foreshortened, bereft of singing and with no coffee and chat afterwards, how do we handle it?

One option is to look back and think only of what is *not*. This was something the Israelites, led by Moses across the wilderness majored in until Moses himself was ready to give up. (**Exodus 11:15**) Then subsequently, when in exile, there was more looking back: "On the willows there we hung up our harps - how could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (**Psalm 137**)

We have a choice. Do we think only of what is not, or do we draw on the riches of the past and adapt them to the present moment? Bereft of singing, a decision was made in one congregation to hum, on the basis that you hum with closed mouth, and it's actually very beautiful. We can embrace the chance to be quiet, together. To listen to new music, whether recorded or live. We can experiment, within the set parameters, and praise God in new ways that connect with the old.

Jesus tackled this issue when he spoke about seeking the kingdom of God, (**Matthew 13:44-52**) "every scribe who is trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who

draws out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” As we move forward uncertainly, rather than sighing for the past, we can also draw on the old and the new to the glory of God and the building up of his kingdom here on earth.

And if there are one or two (or more!) blots and errors and wobbles along the way, don't worry. God knows our weaknesses and our strengths, and his Spirit will help us and Christ will lead us, however uncertain the way may be.

Pause for a moment and reflect –

What have you learnt from the past? How do you feel, today? And the future?



*Iona, Columba's bay where he landed c.563 to begin his new life,
one that that brought blessing to countless people.*

For the past - give thanks. For the present – live fully. For the future – trust

A Prayer:

Thankful we come to you, Eternal Lord God our Father, with thoughts of the past.

There is so much that brings us joy in the remembering,

and so much that brings us sorrow or even anger.

Some of all this has shaped us for the good, and we praise and thank you

for times that have not always been easy, but have taught us much about you,

about the world and about ourselves.

Some remains dark within us, and we try to offer it to you now,

asking that the light of Christ may shine within the dark, shadowy places of our lives

to bring forgiveness, healing, peace and new hope.

Eyes wide open, we look at the world around us.

We are in a strange place, Lord, where advice, instructions change day by day,
a place in which the old certainties have been shaken.

Yet, you are with us still, no matter how uncertain the times,
and we praise and thank you for that truth,

and for the blessing we can draw from the past, as well as finding new blessing in the future.

Thank you for those who are a blessing to us:

those who encourage us by their words and actions,

and those who faithfully hold us in their thoughts and prayers.

May we be such people for others, resting upon your strength.

As more church fellowships consider reopening or are already seeking new ways of worship,
we ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit –

- ❖ to comfort, when reopening cannot happen yet.
- ❖ to guide, where new patterns are being tried out and established
- ❖ to share your true joy with all.

Loving, Eternal God, Father Son and Spirit, we praise you, today and always. Amen

Blessings, Ruth