

Sunday 20th September

Game of Snakes and Ladders, anyone?



If you are competitive, it's a tense game, is Snakes and Ladders. The toss of the dice, the small ladder giving us a lift . . . the big ladder hurtling us up towards the finish line . . . the little snake, sneaking us back a row or two . . . the big snake, sliding us right back down.

We seem to be getting somewhere with the pandemic, then down we go again . . . just like a game of snakes and ladders? The ladder of increased freedom which brings us joy, not only in that we can meet up with others but in the knowledge that we are edging up towards the time we will be quite free of the virus . . . and then the slide back down to restrictions, some of which we find it hard to understand. A bit arbitrary, like Snakes and Ladders.

The concept of chance is a tricky one. I'm aware that many Christians believe that God has our lives all mapped out while others, myself included, believe that there is a randomness in life that we all face and it's how we respond to that randomness which matters, that God strengthens and guides us through the tough times that fall to us. I don't choose to go into detail, but please be assured I don't speak in a vacuum but have much experience of loss and both mental and physical ill health. But, hey, I'm mostly happy. Well, sometimes more than others!

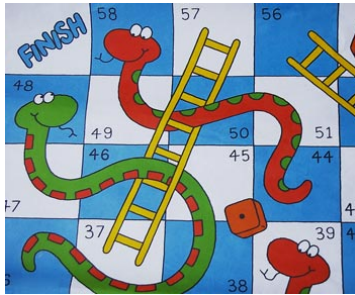
Faith is not an insurance policy, nor are we in a game, counters being moved about at the throw of a dice. We may find ourselves in difficult situations, as at the present time, but we have choice in how we live life: we can live selfishly, or we can live with an awareness of the needs of others. We can live as if our little corner of the earth is all there is, or we can live knowing that there is something precious and beautiful around, within and beyond. The glory of creation; the blessing of others; the life and love of God, Father Son and Spirit.

St Paul understood this: he lists, in 2 Corinthians 11 a list of hardships that can make anyone gasp, but he continued to work for the sake of the people who sneer at him, and to rejoice that they might learn the truth of the Gospel of Christ. In **Romans 12: 9-13** he teaches a way of living that reflects the love of Jesus: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer."

Jesus himself warned his disciples that the way ahead of them was not going to be easy, that he was sending them out as lambs among wolves (**Luke 10:1-3**), warned them that they would have

to take up their own cross if they were to follow him. (**Matthew 10:37-38, 16:24-26, Mark 8:34-37, Luke 9:23-25**) With so many references, I think we're meant to take this teaching very seriously and get on with living in the light of it.

The pandemic is a big thing to face, made more difficult by the changing instructions we receive. We might be sliding down the snake at the moment, but we'll move on to find a ladder sooner or later and in the meanwhile surely we need to live so that *all* might live as full lives as possible, even within whatever restrictions are placed upon us.



Snakes and Ladders is a good game if you know how to laugh. Then the snakes are less important, can even be a source of fun. "Oh, down we go again! Whee!"

And don't forget, you need to put a bit of effort into climbing ladders!

A Prayer

Living, Eternal Lord God, we rejoice in hope, for you have placed us in this world,
a place of beauty and wonder with signs all around us of new life,
opportunity for new beginning, day by day.

We reach out joyfully for the hope you promise of life in its fullness,
the life won for us by Jesus our Saviour, your Son,
who did not avoid the suffering of Crucifixion, mockery and death
that we might be raised to life in you.

We praise and thank you, too, for the strengthening and guiding of your Holy Spirit
to give us the energy and will to climb whatever steeps we need to face.

But patience, Lord, that is difficult.

Suffering, loss, restrictions of many kinds come to us and we long to be rid of them.

We bring to you those who have had to cancel large events that matter to them,
those still unable to meet with all their family, those who feel their lives unduly circumscribed.

For them, Lord, we pray patience and calm.

But we also bring those whose lives are restricted without hope of swift change –
those imprisoned, especially remembering those imprisoned for sharing their faith,
or, in unjust regimes, for helping the poor.

We bring refugees and asylum seekers in their desperation . . .

those who suffer natural disaster: wildfires, drought, flood, seismic activity.

Perseverance in prayer, Lord, can be difficult too.

We persevere in remembering and thinking of others, but often we do not know how to pray, or our thoughts and words seem inadequate.

Yet we remember that you know us and understand us better than we know ourselves and know the yearnings of our hearts.

We bring those situations and people that lie heavily upon our hearts and minds; we think of them, we think of you, knowing that you hold all in your love.

We bring

- ❖ those who have died, thanking you for them, and the faithfulness of their lives.
- ❖ those who are ill, seeking your healing to fill and uphold them, your peace to be with them
- ❖ those who are suffering loss of any kind
- ❖ those who are afraid
- ❖ those who speak out against injustice, even imperilling their own lives
- ❖ those who speak truth in the corridors of power, when that truth is not welcomed
- ❖ those who alert the world to climate change. For all who speak out we ask the power of your Spirit to bring wisdom and the persistence to continue.

Hold us, Lord God our Father, in your love. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen

Blessings, Ruth