

Take Time to be Slow – Something for Lent

This is the time to be slow,
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes.

Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning.

Happy Lent Everyone!

I just wanted to offer something else – besides our Bible Studies and the Living Hope resources from the Church of England – which you might like to reflect on in these weeks leading up to Easter.

I know some of you will react with dismay at the very sight of a poem but, as they say, ‘bear with ...’ I think Poetry is an amazing tool for communicating complicated things in often very few words. Poets and Poetry very often get to the heart of the matter very quickly. I’m not a literary expert and I find short poems suit my attention span best! So here is one that I keep returning to which I offer for Lent. (Re-read it again now slowly before you read on)

The author of the poem, John O'Donohue, Ph.D., was born in County Clare in 1956. He spoke Irish as his native language and lived in a remote cottage in the west of Ireland until his untimely death in January 2008. A highly respected poet and philosopher, he lectured throughout Europe and America and wrote a number of popular books, including *Anam Cara* and *To Bless the Space Between Us*.

I first saw this poem quite a few years ago on an Underground Train to Piccadilly from St Pancras. It has struck me off-and-on ever since as a poem for our time; our complicated, bewildering and frankly frightening age. This age is indeed a ‘time to be slow,’ to take time and look for another time when ‘the air will be kind and blushed with beginning.’

It's a great poem to ponder as we seek to renew our living hope in Jesus Christ during Lent. It's a good poem too for this season of the year as nature begins to come back to life – a season ‘blushed with beginning.’

Lent for me is about back to basics. It is a time to remember what is important and to slow down in my thinking and in my doing so as not to be overtaken and overwhelmed by anxiety and restlessness or sadness at missed opportunities or the state of the world and the way people treat each other. It is also a reminder to all of us not to be too hard on ourselves. We are who we are. We feel how we feel. As Henri Nouwen was quick to say, ‘We are the Beloved.’ We are good enough. YOU are good enough. So

take time to be 'slow' and even if you're not into poems read these words again, read them everyday in Lent

We are who we are. We feel how we feel. We are the Beloved. We are good enough.

It may be a time for us to 'lie low to the wall until the bitter weather passes.' We all encounter that 'bitter weather' in life and it seems to me anyway that the world is in a time of 'bitter weather.' Imagine sheltering from a strong wind behind a stone wall on top of a Yorkshire moor.

But the weather will pass. All things pass.

I love the image of a 'wire brush of doubt' scraping at our hearts. That's how self-doubt can feel – as if we are being diminished somehow. As if we are not being good followers of Jesus, good disciples, if we doubt. Doubting can leave us more fragile, yes, as we are battered by the storms of life, but it can also lead to growth as we question old assumptions and attitudes. It can mean we lose our sense of self and our 'hesitant light' which is why it is so important to have a season like Lent when we can focus on the basics of prayer and Bible, Communion and Community, when we can remember what feeds us and who feeds us!

When we are losing ourselves, our sense of self, in the complications of life we need 'to remain generous' as O'Donohue puts it – being open, remaining faithful even when we cannot see or know the way ahead, recalling again and again the love God has for us rather than ours for God and because God is faithful ...

Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning."

We will recover our sense of self, but we don't do it by focussing entirely on ourselves but by focussing instead on God and eventually the 'air will be kind again and blushed with new beginnings and the World WILL be not a perfect place but a better one.

