

Dear friends

I currently have my laptop set up on the dining room table, as the background is less cluttered than my study bookshelves for when I am taking part in Zoom meetings or services, so I felt it would be less of a distraction for others taking part. Another advantage of this is that I have a view in the foreground of the beautiful viburnum growing along the railings of the balcony at the manse, with the woods between Armitage Bridge and Nether-ton in the middle distance and the summit of West Nab pointing skywards on the horizon.

Living through a pandemic has so many negatives, but one positive I've been able to take from this time of lockdown is a growing sense, or perhaps recovering one I had lost over the years, of what a beautiful part of the world I live in. On my daily walk yesterday I heard the song of many different birds, though I couldn't identify the majority of them, and I was able to appreciate the beautiful colours of the spring flowers, not only in gardens, but along hedgerows too. It was so sad to see on television the thousands of tulips in the Dutch bulbfields which will have to be destroyed this year, but I now have some very pretty pale pink ones in a vase on our hearth that I bought along with essential bread and milk at my local Coop this morning.

The beauty of our surroundings, be they in the Colne Valley or where I live below Castle Hill, is something we perhaps take for granted at times, but something for which I'm finding a new appreciation. And a new appreciation too for some of our Bible passages which refer to the beauty of Creation, the well-known stories in Genesis, the way the Psalmists speak of the world around them. Perhaps I could suggest reading again the words of Psalm 8 or Psalm 96. Some verses in Job chapter 12 encourage us to 'speak to the earth and it will teach you'.

Establishing a new rhythm is something that many people are feeling a need for at this time of uncertainty, when it's sometimes hard when we wake up to recall what day it is, when the days can seem to stretch endlessly ahead, with little structure unless we create one. Nature has its seasons and its rhythms; it may be that we can find these helpful: the daylight increasing in roughly equal amounts each day, knowing that the bluebells will come into flower at about the same time each year (depending on the weather), anticipating strawberry plants fruiting in our gardens or the bilberries on our hillsides. 'The rhythm of life is a powerful beat', perhaps one we need more than ever this year.

With my best wishes

Sue