

Rural Reflection No 2. Sunday 29th March 2020

In normal times, I love to see the sun rise and set. This daily ritual (when the timings are manageable!) feeds my soul. I know I'm not alone in this. From the earliest times, people have sensed God in these moments that border day and night. When the biblical priest, Zechariah, needed an image to express his joy, he used the most dramatic picture he could imagine, that of the sunrise. He proclaimed,

In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Zechariah's words have become cherished liturgy in the Church.

Amidst the present darkness of our world, I am truly thankful that we continue to be encouraged to take a daily walk.

You may recall the beauty of Wednesday morning. As the mist rose from the valley in front of my house, early sunlight lit up a frosty landscape into a sparkly, bejewelled wonderland. I just couldn't resist heading out early (despite using up my precious daily exercise allowance before 7.00am!).

I stood and watched as wonderful colours spread across the sky in awesome beauty. These moments of the day are beyond our control. The frost covers the ground and the sun rises regardless of what we do with this day. When we stand to watch the beauty of the natural world, I think it offers us the opportunity to become healthily grounded. We can only watch in humility as an observer of something wondrous and unstoppable, freely given for us all.

Whilst many of us are missing contact with others, these walks in the countryside connect us to the whole of creation. The dawn chorus is an undeniable reminder that the sunrise wakes many species, not just humans. We might not be sharing walks with our usual friends but there's plenty of company out there!

I took several photographs on Wednesday morning. They are very disappointing! But they serve as a reminder that sometimes you cannot replicate moments of awesome wonder. You have to experience them and in current parlance, 'be in the moment'. The present times might offer some of us a new opportunity to be 'in the moment'. We might become aware of details in the natural world that we wouldn't have noticed when life was busier. Many people sense that these breath-taking spectacles are glimpses of God's love for the world. If you're out early in the morning, you might even experience 'the tender compassion of our God as the dawn from on high breaks upon you, shining on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and guiding our feet in to the way of peace'.

May God's peace be with you during these challenging times.

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