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It's unmistakably autumn!

With the shift in season come new challenges as we continue to live, work and worship in a pandemic. Across the globe we're seeing infection rates rise and a growing proportion of communities across the UK are now subject to local lockdowns and increasing restrictions.

I remember being struck, back at the beginning of the national lockdown, by how fortunate we were that it was taking place in the spring. Days were getting longer, the sun – almost omnipresent in those early weeks, it seems looking back! – was brighter, trees were coming into bud and we spent all our time in gardens or going for walks. The joy of rose-tinted spectacles!

Now we face the prospect of the opposite experience. As restrictions on where people can meet become more stringent - here in Leicester we can only meet those outside of our household or 'bubble' out of doors - the onset of colder, wetter weather will make maintaining legal social contact more and more difficult; as this becomes the reality for larger numbers of people, please pray particularly for those living alone.

And yet...

As I sit at my 'desk' (by which I mean my dining table!), the sun is shining, and I can see rudbeckias and the last of my tomato crop through the window. Like the ubiquitous rainbows of early lockdown, they're a tangible sign that this too shall pass, that the world continues to turn, and that God is faithful.

Go well!

Louise, on behalf of the wider Arthur Rank Centre team

Praise God for the law!

Bible reading: Psalm 119:49-56

Remember your word to your servant,
in which you have made me hope.
This is my comfort in my distress,
that your promise gives me life.
The arrogant utterly deride me,
but I do not turn away from your law.
When I think of your ordinances from of old,
I take comfort, O Lord.
Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked,

those who forsake your law.
Your statutes have been my songs
wherever I make my home.
I remember your name in the night, O Lord,
and keep your law.
This blessing has fallen to me,
for I have kept your precepts.

Reflection

This Psalm, with its 176 verses, is the longest in the Bible and tends to be split into smaller sections when we read it as part of daily worship. However, there is a coherent thread which runs right through it, that of thanking and praising God for the law.

It's easy to take a dim view of rules and regulations especially at the moment, where what you can do, with whom and where, depends very much on where you happen to live. We see examples of exemplary rule keeping and flagrant rule breaking from all parts of our society. But the Psalmist praises God for the law, for the comfort and security it brings. This is quite hard for me to get my head around. I'm a great fan of process, procedure and clarity... as long as it suits me! If I am honest, when I am with good friends or close family, I find abiding by the personal restrictions and social distancing very hard indeed. I understand the need and the fact that doing so will protect me and others, but I don't find much cause for praising. If anything, I worry that it's going to be a long winter this year.

A wise friend once said to me, 'When you don't know what to pray, praise God. Start with praise.' That's why I love Psalm 119. It's a psalm of praise of God and God's gift to us, and because law is an unlikely gift in my eyes, it helps me to appreciate an aspect of God I seldom explore. This psalm gives me an opening to give thanks and praise for each of us and for the God who cares for us.

Prayer

God of all,
When I rail against restrictions,
remind me I am held firmly in Your strong arms.
When I cry out to you in the pain of loneliness and sadness,
show me Your light in grey days.
When I do not know where to turn,
thank you that You are waiting for me.
Keep me praising You, keep me loving others, keep me kind to myself.
In the redeeming name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

Response

How might I prepare some praise for God which I can use at more difficult moments? Can I write out Bible verses and put them on the fridge, or print some photos, or cut out pictures from a magazine?

Who among my friends and family will help me to praise God throughout the coming months? How will I stay in touch and praise God with them?

Revd Claire Maxim, CEO, Arthur Rank Centre