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Holding onto the truth

I've written a few of these introductions now! In fact, the next email - due to hit your inboxes on Tues 22 September - will, of course, mark six months since the start of the national lockdown and the start of this regular missive from us to you.

So you'd think that I'd have this intro thing down to a fine art by now!

Actually, I've found it really difficult to decide what to write today. For the first time in a while - perhaps since that very first email - I've struggled to find a theme or an idea that I think might have at least some relevance to all those who will read this.

On reflection, I suspect that that's largely to do with the fact that we've moved a long way from those early days when we were all living under the same restrictions and following the same guidance, able to parrot at the drop of a hat that simple three-phrase slogan, 'Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives'.

Now our experience of the pandemic depends on where we live, what stage of life we're at, our profession, our family circumstances and so much more.

So today I'm turning again to Hebrews 13:8 and that reminder that 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever'. Whatever the restrictions we're living under, whether our church is open or shut, despite the challenges facing our children as they go back to school, we can hold on to that promise, knowing that Jesus is with us, whatever we're living through.

And I hope that's a truth that has at least some relevance to all those who will read this!

Know that we continue to keep you in our thoughts and prayers.

Go well!

Louise, on behalf of all at the Arthur Rank Centre

Faith that Moves Mountains

Bible Reading: Matthew 21:18-22

Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig-tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, 'May you never bear fruit again!' Immediately the tree withered.

When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. 'How did the fig-tree wither so quickly?' they asked.

Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig-tree, but also you can say to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea," and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.'

Reflection

Only in Matthew's gospel do we read the comments of Jesus regarding prayer after the fig tree had withered. The failure of the fig tree to offer fruit, though the abundance of leaves had suggested fruit would have been there, has provided material for many sermons on the subject of hypocrisy. But Matthew focuses on the issue of faith and prayer.

Is this a lesson about the power of prayer or the importance of trust? When I was invited to write something about this passage, I was also given the option of reflecting on Psalm 121 which opens with the psalmist looking at the hills facing him. and then declares that his help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. I suggest that it is unlikely that Jesus expected his disciples to practise removing mountains to improve their view. Rather the hyperbole emphasizes the importance of faith, or trust, when faced with obstacles in our pathway.

Faith is not something that requires some kind of special effort on our behalf; rather it is about simple trust, resting in God's nature and promises. There is no route to Jerusalem without confronting many challenging hills. The psalmist, having declared where his help comes from, goes on to reflect on God's faithfulness, watching over us day and night; a God who never sleeps, not even dozing for a moment. He knows what every step our life's journey will demand, and we are always in his care.

While I have never heard of anyone actually removing a mountain, I have heard of many occasions where Christians have found themselves in daunting circumstances and where confidence in God's power and love has carried them through as if there was no problem at all. It is not so much about the degree of faith but the one in whom the faith has been placed. Our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

The idea of removing the mountain in front of us might seem attractive, but the view from the top brings its own reward. Getting there will almost certainly require fixing our eyes, not on the steepness of the incline, but on the Lord, in whose loving care we are all held.

Prayer

Loving God,

Open our eyes to see your greatness.

Teach us to trust you through the tough and challenging times we face.

Grant us the quiet confidence that we are always in your care.

Give us faith that can move mountains or the strength for the upward climb

Amen

Response

While some are keeping busy and have the opportunity to interact with others, many older people find themselves on their own and long for more human interaction. Do you have neighbours, folk from your church, or old friends now on their own? Why not make it a habit to daily list a few people for whom a phone call from you might make a bigger difference than you could imagine. Then make some encouraging phone calls.

Revd Barry Osborne, Rural Mission Solutions