

Thought for the Day, 17 April 2020

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.

(Philippians 4.12)

It somehow heartens me to find that Paul had to LEARN to be content! This great theologian and leader of men did not escape having to learn the hard way, as we do, but through difficult circumstances that had him struggling at times. I should not really be surprised - after all, it took a pretty dramatic Damascus Road encounter to convince him that he had got things wrong!

I wonder if he ever thought, or hoped, that having been given such an important commission - to be the Apostle to the Gentiles - he might expect a degree of divine protection in order to carry out his special work. But this proved to be no easier for him than had been the path of his Master before him. His story is one of beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, and finally martyrdom. Yet his words and influence live on - he did not fail.

During these recent weeks of uncertainty we have rightly been encouraging each other with reminders of God's love and care for each one of us. But it would be a mistake not to see the challenges before us in this situation. Some enormous ones face the whole world, and society, as we have to reshape our priorities when we come out of lockdown. And we do pray that good will come out of this.

But, nearer to home, many will have to face lives changed totally, for example by bereavement, or job loss. For such, we also pray. Thankfully, we are not all faced with the gravest of these challenges - and we should remember how many of our Christian family live in places of persecution and hardship around the world, as Ivan Hacking quite rightly brings to our attention. But there are also challenges for each of us in our

everyday lives. Paul again knew about these, as he said, *For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing (Romans 7.19)*. It doesn't go away! Small things can make a big difference.

I would like to share with you one of my most cherished memories. On arrival in our new parish in Bedford we were greeted by a wonderful lady. Tall, thin, a fairly intimidating spinster, her words were, 'I know there have got to be changes, and I will HATE them. But I am with you every step of the way.' Her selfless, devoted support still bears fruit several more vicars down the line, even though not many now remember her name.

Change can indeed be challenging. Who said it would be easy? Just ask Paul!

Ruth Tiller