

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

10th March 2021

I'm sure we've all had times when we've been glad to be safely indoors when there is a gale blowing outside, or to settle down cosily in front of a fire on a cold winter's evening. I've noticed that in recent years there seem to be a lot of shawls and daytime blankets for sale which is possibly indicative of our fundamental need to feel protected and comforted in an ever more uncertain world. I have a feeling that sales will have rocketed this winter. Many of us are feeling that this last lockdown has been a long haul and perhaps we are more fragile and vulnerable than we might consciously realise. Maybe that primitive urge to snuggle down is especially strong.

Many of the psalms call on God in different ways to be our strength and our refuge in times of doubt, anxiety and difficulty. However one of my favourite images comes from Psalm 17 where the psalmist asks God to 'hide me under the shadow of your wings'. It is echoed elsewhere in the psalms but this seems to me to be its most personal form. We use these particular words at Compline as we prepare to go to rest at the end of the day.

It always brings to mind a picture in a book which I had as a child. It was called 'The Cuckoo Clock' and told a version of that familiar story of a little girl being sent to live with elderly spinster aunts. In this case, Griselda, as she was called, was befriended by the cuckoo from the drawing room clock who took her on various adventures and taught her quite a lot about life along the way. When they were going somewhere cold or on a long flight, the cuckoo would wrap the child in a cloak of feathers and the picture in the book made it seem as if she was enveloped by wings, keeping her warm and safe. I loved that book but this is the only picture I can remember now.

I also recall that last summer I was concerned that I could see our resident mother duck but no sign of her brood. Looking more carefully, I noticed that she seemed very fluffed out and yes, sure enough, all the ducklings were safely tucked under her wings. Goodness knows how she fitted them all in. Jesus uses the image of a hen not a duck when in Matthew 23:37 he says, 'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings' but the principle is the same. Sadly he goes on, 'And you were not willing!'

I wonder how ready we are, as it were, to snuggle down in God's presence and to rest in the shadow of his wings, the warmth of his embrace. I fear that we find it difficult to let him care for us. All too often we think that everything is up to us, that we need to 'do' in order for something to happen, that we need to be in control. In an earlier Thought for the Week, I shared a poem by Edwina Gateley about letting God love us. Here's another of her poems. This one was written in connection with her work with marginalized women of all races, creeds and economic backgrounds who carry wounds from violence, drugs and prostitution, helping them to find healings and hope. I think that it has more universal application. One of the phrases which I find particularly striking and challenging is 'when you are still enough to let me hold you'.

Maybe more than anything at the moment, we all need to let ourselves be wrapped in God's shawl or hidden under the shadow of his wings, whichever image you prefer, so that we can find the rest and the healing that we all need. You might find it helps actually to have a shawl or a blanket to hand as you ponder the poem.

Come. Hide in me.

Come.
Hide in me,
said God!
I have this huge,
huge shawl,
and, when you are
still enough
to let me hold you,
I will wrap you round
in warmth
and you will be
cocooned in love
and disappear in me.

Edwina Gateley.

With my love and prayers

Camilla

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