

New Year Message

From our moderator

Last autumn when the word “zoom” was a function of camera lenses, before the term Covid-19 had been invented, before we had ever considered putting the word “social” next to the word “distancing”, or wearing a mask to go shopping, we were out in the countryside. We walked past a small bush. It was rather like the burning bush in Exodus, being covered in beautiful flame like pink pods each one open revealing a bright orange seed. Never having seen such a shrub and being the curious sort of person I am, I took a few of the seeds and their pods home to identify them, and if possible grow them on. I quite fancied my own personal burning bush.

The bush was in fact a spindle bush, a variety of euonymus. You may well have seen one, my brother in law apparently has one in his garden.

The experts tell me however that the seeds are very difficult to germinate. They need to be kept warm and damp for a few months, then kept damp, at freezing temperatures for at least another three months preferably longer. Finally, they need to be instantly planted once they start growing. Even then they don't easily become bushes. I have taken the chance. They lived in the airing cupboard for many weeks, and now they are in the fridge until Spring, I live in hope that sometime next year I might have my own burning bush.

Thinking about that, seemed to me a parable of the situation we are in as we move into the New Year of 2021. At the beginning of the year like the seeds we seemed to bask in glorious warm weather. At the same time the problems of Brexit and the nature of the disease that now we call Covid-19 had not really sunk in. Then as the year came to an end the disease statistics mounted up, and the Brexit deal receded. Politicians looked increasingly worried. Then borders began to close, emergency regulations came into force, people began to wear masks, shops had to shut, churches closed, we talked of lockdowns, shielding, tiers, worst of all a hike in the price of French cheeses.

The prime minister once he had recovered from the disease appeared on the television looking somewhat pale, flanked by scientists and economists. At the moment of course the difficulties of Brexit seem to have receded somewhat, apart from the fish, and there are rumours of octogenarians being vaccinated as close as Thrapston, offset only by rumours of more virulent viral mutations. And further containment measures. Our daughter said “Soon we will be in Tier 6, when you are not allowed to look out of the windows”.

It seems however despite the ongoing problems, that there is a light in the distance, the pharmaceutical companies, backed by philanthropists and governments have done an amazing job to produce a series of vaccines to be given as the new year progresses. And the politicians seem to have come to some sort of agreement. Though in both cases apparently there is still some distance to go.

To use the illustration, the seeds are still in the fridge but by spring or perhaps summer, we should have green shoots and sometime after who knows, we might even have a merrily burning bush, so that some form of normal life can resume, and we can all come out the Egyptian slavery of isolation and lockdown.

Perhaps the illustration with a little further stretching can be used of our life of faith, for some of us at the moment it feels as though we are living in the cold and dark of the spiritual fridge. Church

buildings are more or less closed. Congregational hymn singing is out of the question. Fellowship as we have known it is not possible. We cannot even hug our much loved family members and friends. However, as we move into the new year, whatever the situation, we have the seed of the burning bush within us, that is the hope of the kingdom of God ahead, and the promise that we are never alone, God is always with us and leads us into the future. Moreover, He has a habit of growing great shrubs from small seeds. And setting desiccated desert bushes on fire. In fact, Jesus on one occasion used the illustration of seeds scattered on the ground that seemed to disappear into the earth and be lost. But actually were secretly germinating out of sight and would one day bring a tremendous harvest.

Mark 4.26 This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces corn—first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

May God bless you and give you his peace as we go into this new Year of 2021

David