

Friendship in Christ

19 July 2020

Philippians 4.10-13, by Rev Ruth Moriarty

I was delighted to read that the white stork has returned to the UK after 606 years. Not since 1414 have storks built a nest in the UK and this year on 6 May little baby chicks have been spotted here in the top of an oak tree at Knepp Estate, near Brighton.

The stork is often associated with new birth – often found on new baby cards. Why? Because these birds fly from Africa to the UK in spring, their nests and joyful bills clattering are associated with marital tenderness and of new birth.

In our world we used to hearing that something has closed down, or ended so to find a story that reminds us that something new and wonderful has blossomed, has been renewed is wonderful. And it is that moment of delight, a genuinely warm affection for nature and new life that Paul has for the Philippian church.

When you first hear Paul say ‘at last you have renewed your concern for me’ you might think he’s a bit annoyed, but he’s not. The word renewed for Paul meant blossomed, a new spring growth that charms the soul. So here then we actually see a beautiful picture of friendship between Paul and the Philippian church. It is a friendship that has been created through working in partnership in the gospel. It is a friendship that has endured and Paul is happy indeed to hear from them once more, just as all of us delight in new birth in the spring.

Friendship in Paul’s time was different to now, it was slightly more formal and was based on giving and receiving. Paul gives his letter, and support to the church and receives their care and support. And this friendship grows through working together, building a church and serving Christ side by side and then at a distance as Paul is now in prison in Rome. Just like today, when an old friend gets in touch it warms our hearts and lifts our souls, so too Paul is lifted to hear from this church.

In lockdown all of us have had to become more self-sufficient – learning how to cut hair, bake

bread, tend gardens and window boxes, teach small children how to read. In Paul’s time self-sufficiency was highly sought after. The Stoics believed that the goal of life is for each individual to be self-sufficient, that no external power was necessary that man was complete in and of himself. When we are hurting and have been let down by others, one strategy we use is to say – I don’t need anyone. I don’t want anyone else to help me, I can manage on my own.

Here Christ offers you friendship. He calls us friends, and his presence in our lives strengthens us. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Life can throw us all sorts of curve balls; we can be poor one minute and win the lottery the next.

Each of us do not know what will happen next, we cannot be assured of our health, our status, our possessions, our relationships. But there is one thing that is constant and that is the love of Christ for us, and the friendship offered to us with strengthens us. It is God who enables us to stand under oppression, God who helps us when we are weak, God who loves us and heals us when we need restoration – so he is sufficient. He is enough for us.

God’s friendship towards us is based on a call – he calls each of us to follow him. He made us, he loves us, and he calls us – come follow me, come walk with me, come and be fishers of people.

The beauty of God is that he does not call just one person, but he calls all of us. As each of us seek Christ, so our joy increases. For as we seek and serve God together, so we share our friendship with God with each other. How can we share our friendship with God and with each other in these days?

Christ Church we can do everything because Christ strengthens us. Not that we can do anything we fancy, not that if we call out in God’s name we’ll be given a golden statue, but that if we seek Christ in every circumstance as individuals and as a church we will rejoice as our life together blossoms and grows.

May we know God’s joy as we see new life in our church and our community, may we seek God’s joy and may Christ be our strength. Amen.