**The Colour of God’s Love**

Three things have coincided to produce this reflection for Stilling Prayer. The first is the colourful palate of the season of autumn; the second is the resignation of Justin Welby; the third is something I have been reading about the central place of love at the heart of our faith.

Southwell is a small town, and we can quickly get in touch with the natural world. One early morning last week began with pre-dawn blackness which crept into dark grey, and then to the palest yellow in the East. The yellow turned to pink, edging the low clouds, and merged into a delicate blue that became the background to trees stripped bare of their leaves. Soon the sky flamed red, purple and orange as the sun came up over the horizon. Then the air over the winter wheat turned green and the ground was briefly silver as the sun lit up the dew. Finally the beech trees turned a startling gold and remained so all day. There is no doubt on such mornings that God is the greatest artist in His Creation. As we read in the wonderful poetic parable about the universe in Genesis, ‘God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light.’

Then the archbishop resigned. Because of inertia, neglect or – worse - a wish to protect the institution, the awful crimes of a serial paedophile were never dealt with. John Smyth escaped to Africa to continue his abuse, and victims here were ignored; as the prayers at the Minster yesterday said: ‘We confess the Church’s failure to protect the vulnerable from dangerous individuals, and to report their cruel behaviour. We pray for all who have been damaged within the Church’. We all feel tainted by this, not least when a bunch of flowers was left at our church gate on Wednesday with the message, ‘Remember the victims. No more cover-ups’, implying that every church is somehow involved. The mood is grey, dark grey. I know intellectually that God is there, but He **feels** invisible.

It can feel in grey times that we hang on to God by our finger-tips and with a great effort on our part. But it is of course God in Christ who is hanging on to us, like a parent holding the hand of a small child on a dark evening. The love that parents or uncles or aunties have for children in their families is constant, whether they are being delightful or argumentative. That love, when it’s real love, doesn’t dissolve when things get tough. God’s love in similar.

In all situations we can experience the love of God (and this comes to what I have read this month). ‘At the core of Christianity there is teaching about the primacy of love. It is not that we first decide to love God and then God loves us. Rather, it is the opposite, namely that God first loved us and it is that gift of God’s love that enables us to love God and love our neighbour. It is through the experience of love, often human love, that we are able to discover the presence of the love of God as a given. … It could also be that through the experience of suffering, or a sense of being abandoned, that the love of God can break through.’

So the love of God is many-coloured, like His Creation: golden times of glory on special occasions; red, blue, orange and pink when our faith makes sense; and so on. But God’s love can also be grey and unmoving as on foggy days, almost obstinate, because He refuses to let go of us when we are in a dark place.

The prophet Jeremiah sums it up very well, and his words leads us into the silence: ‘The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.’ (Lamentations 2:22)

 **To lead us into the stillness** a verse from a Brian Wren hymn

          Great God, your love has called us here

as we, by love, for love were made.

          Your living likeness still we bear,

though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.

We come, with all our heart and mind,

your call to hear, your love to find.

**Leaving the stillness** the final verse of the same hymn

Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit’s liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.