**A high-wire act.**

As Vincent was reflecting last week, the start of this year has not felt very easy with storms, difficult personal circumstances for some and with unrelenting news of a world in turmoil. A tide of discontent and anger fuels division and extreme politics and creates disturbing uncertainty about what the future holds for our world. I find it easy to be sucked in if I am not careful; I sense storm clouds gathering, unease and anxiety arise within me in response.

In Matthew 24, Jesus tells his disciples to expect exactly this kind of news as the sign of his coming:6 You will hear of wars and rumours of wars but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth-pains.

How are we not to be alarmed, to be resilient, faithful and hopeful people of God when storms break and even engulf us? Proverbs 3:5-6 says to: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and He will make straight (or direct) your paths.” What does it mean to trust in God when we are feeling agitated and alarmed?

The Victorian showman Charles Blondin became famous as the first person to walk across Niagara falls on a highwire, returning there many times thereafter, drawing great crowds. His increasingly bold stunts included carrying a table and chairs over and stopping to sit down and cook an omelette mid-way. One stunt involved trundling a wheelbarrow across. Having crossed successfully, he asked if the crowd believed he could do it with someone in the barrow. “Yes,” the crowd roared, whereupon he promptly invited a person at the front to climb in. The crowd went very quiet! We may well believe, but to trust is to climb in the wheelbarrow.

Blondin also crossed the falls carrying his manager on his back. Setting off, Blondin instructed the poor man to simply hold on tightly(!) like a sack, for if he were to try to balance or move, they would both die. To trust God, is like that: “to hold on, tightly,” and allow him to carry us, whether we are at peace or screaming inside. Our Lord does not require perfection from us, or even for us to ‘do it right’. Anxiety, making mistakes or experiencing pain all lead us toward greater reliance upon God. He can and does bless us, right where we are, we do not need to pretend otherwise.

As we come to silence again this evening, we are invited to simply hold onto God, to lean into and draw on his love and mercy toward us, and to trust Him to carry us through uncertain times. We can trust in God’s saving and transforming work in us and in His world. Such trust secures inner freedom and liberates a generous and determined hope within us that is salt and light to a world in clamour and confusion around us.

**To lead us into silent stillness** we use *Patient Trust* – a prayer of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress

that it is made by passing through some stages of instability -

and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;

your ideas mature gradually - let them grow,

let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don’t try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time

(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)

will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit

gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself

in suspense and incomplete.

**To lead us from silence:**

Dear Lord and Father of mankind

forgive our foolish ways

re-clothe us in our rightful mind,

in purer lives thy service find,

in deeper reverence praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,

beside the Syrian sea,

the gracious calling of the Lord,

let us, like them, without a word

rise up and follow thee.

Breathe through the heats of our desire,

thy coolness and thy balm;

let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;

speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,

O still small voice of calm.

Amen.

John Greenleaf Whittier