

Dear Friends,

Who would have thought that 11 months ago we would be resuming our greetings from the *Derbyshire Rural Chaplaincy* by letter and email? For since March 2020, we hardly need reminding that we are in our third lockdown and that the horrible *Covid-19* virus has mutated into at least two different forms against which some vaccines now seem questionable. Few people are hazarding a guess as to when 'normality' will return. In the light of this situation, the *Derbyshire Rural Chaplaincy* has decided to restart the weekly reflections bringing thoughts of hope with the reassurance of God's loving care for each one of us.

But there is more good news! During this long haul, people generally have become much more appreciative of things which they passed by before, such as nature and the benefits of open spaces. They are learning to value the countryside as a resource for refreshment and exercise; cycling and walking have increased amongst people, which has also brought a thankfulness for rural places of peace and quiet. Of course, farmers in particular, know all about the expanse of the countryside and its values not only as a place of work but also for renewing energies and relaxation in relative safety.

During the last year, we have seen the seasons come and go and, at this time, we all thank God that He is faithful in bringing Spring to bear even if, as I write, we are in the middle of the coldest week of this winter! But the snowdrops are flowering and some gardens are showing the crocuses pushing through the snow and we know that daffodils and tulips will follow later this year. Similarly, in the midst of the despair and frustrations of life, God is still walking alongside each one of us and supporting us with his love and care in his faithfulness to us.

There is a hymn *Great is thy Faithfulness* which is often sung at funerals but is really a hymn for any time of the year. It speaks of God's faithfulness to us through the seasons and nature's 'manifold witness' to God's 'faithfulness, mercy and love'. Of course, we see God's faithfulness in the harvest and in the birth of our animals for, in each case, we need something beyond ourselves to bring the harvest to fruition and for conception to take place. A farm manager's wife told me a while back how she never ceased to marvel at the birth of a calf, much more, in fact, than the births of her own children!

During this time of continued restrictions where isolation in particular can be a problem, let us remember that God is good and faithful and feely he will give us 'strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow' for His compassion is everlasting and will prevail however the future may develop.

So, may God's blessings be with you all and keep you safe.

Stella

(Rev Prof Stella Mills – Associate Chaplain)

