

Change

November is the month we finally and reluctantly bid farewell to summer. In what sometimes feels like a ritual act we have 'put the clocks back' to winter time. Now we turn our faces towards short dark days and long cold nights. We dread what lies ahead: the bad weather, the chest infections, colds and flu. We look back and remember light days and birdsong, flowers and fun. How we long to hold onto summer, yet we know that we cannot.

As we turn in on ourselves, drawing on our inner reserves to get us through the dark times, we realise that it is no coincidence that November has become the season of remembrance, the month of All Saints and All Hallows. It is a pivotal month, this month of re-membering. We adjust to the wintry time ahead, our gaze turning backwards to summer and forwards to winter, within ourselves to sadness and apprehension, outwards to others, to hope and endurance.

As November draws our thoughts inwards, we remember the people who were for so long our present but who have become, despite anything we might have wished to cling to, our past. On Sunday November 1st at 3.00pm, St Martin's church invites local people to a short and gentle service of remembrance of loved ones departed. In the sadness of bereavement there is almost always love. We carry that love with us into the winter months. It helps to turn us outwards once again to those who today are our present.

All Saints and Remembrance Sunday also turn our reflections outward. At the morning service on November 1st we will re-consider how close to the lives of the saints our own lives have been this year and realise that the faith-full and self-less lives of these distinctive men and women leave a lot to be desired in the everyday lives we ourselves live. We turn to them as models and try our best to be a little more like the saints and a little less self-centred. We fall short but know that in God's love we can turn back to Him for support. Forgiven and encouraged, we carry God's blessing with us into the dark days.

On November 11th, Remembrance Day, we remember the darkest of days, times of war and as we give thanks for the blessings in our own lives we also remember and give thanks for lives where the blessings seem lost and hope cut brutally short. We do not know the blessings those who gave their lives for their country knew, or know now, for that we must trust in God. But on Remembrance Sunday (November 8th), in the moment we keep silence in blessed memory of them, we join the country in re-membering; in putting back together memory, sorrow, gratitude and prayers for the future. In this month of re-membering, we join to our reflections on the fragility of life, the certainty and endurance of hope. In faith, and with the help of God, we put our lives back into some kind of balance.

On November 22nd, we will celebrate Christ the King, he whose topsy-turvy kingdom promises all of us the chance of life, hope, peace, with him. On this day, we don't turn inwards or outwards, we concentrate on one-ness with God. In Christ we are as 'one with God' as mere mortals can be. Full one-ness with Christ in glory will come at the end of days. For now we simply and fully, with the whole of ourselves, give thanks and praise that God calls us to be part of his kingdom work. And on the last Sunday of the month, November 29th, we commit ourselves anew to the watching and waiting for Christ's coming, in the season we know as Advent.

November encapsulates life in a way no other month can do. Look out at the world around us, the natural world. In the seeming barren-ness of winter, new life is growing: fawns in the wombs of the red deer at Lyme Park and Tatton, buds on the hydrangea 'Little Lime' on my balcony, nestling beneath the fading heads of this year's flowers, hyacinth and amaryllis bulbs dormant in airing cupboard or garage but soon to shoot forth green leaves and bright flowers to see us through the winter until the snowdrops and crocus take us on into spring. Spring does come round again. That's the promise of this month of re-membering. Out with the old, in with the new. This year, November holds a special significance for me. I shall be 65 and, though as a Reader I need not, I shall be retiring. I have family reasons for doing so but I shall be sad to go. I have many fond memories of my life in the family and Parish of St Martin's, Droylsden. I have sad yet loving – and loved - memories too, of those who have died. Many I knew in the abundance of their lives and creativity, others I only came to know through the memories their families so graciously shared in times of grief and shock. All gifted me with something intangible yet quintessentially human. And so too, do those who will carry on at the heart of this amazing and gifted family of St Martin's Church, each and every one of you, in church or housebound, in health or frailty. I can't thank you individually here but know that you each bring something precious to me and to one another. In taking me into your midst with such abundant love you gave me the greatest gift you possess, the warmth of your humanity. And here too and in no way less I must add the huge and generous love of the family of St Andrew's. You also made me so very welcome and shared all that makes you YOU, as individuals and as a family of faith.

Individually and together the Parishes of St Martin and St Andrew have gifted and sustained me, been channels of God's love and grace and Holy Spirit in my life and helped me to share my journey of faith in Christ, our Lord and Saviour. So now, I too want to offer you a gift, a prayer, a blessing. I mean it when I say 'together'. I have been truly privileged in co-leading worship with both churches every month. It has been a real gifting to receive the present from you. And this is the real present. The present moment, as together you let go of the past, with memories happy and sad, with reluctance and fear of change no doubt, and turn, as one, towards the future. Let it be a future of hope, good faith, graciousness and trust in God. I pray that this winter will be a time of consolidation and optimism; of seeing the potential in new ways of doing things; of nurturing and protecting the buds of future growth. I pray that the Mission Partnership of St Martin's and St Andrew's will not be a sterile church of God, a partnership in name only, divided and heading for divorce, damaged by a failure to let go and let God. All the signs are that you are too faith-full for that. God is in all that you do. He gifts both churches with the maturity of his grace. May God bless you all and may you all be open to his blessing.

And may we together say, Amen.

Penny