

Reflections for 3rd October 2021

19th Sunday after Trinity

Falling, failing and learning

The closing verses of this week's gospel remind me of a preacher I heard reflecting on the similarity between our relationship with God, and the relationship between a loving parent and a young child who is just learning to walk. The parent isn't surprised or disappointed when the child falls – the parent is delighted when the child manages to stay upright, and stumble along for just a few steps. A child who was desperate to avoid falling, and failure, at all costs, would probably never take the necessary risks, and might never learn to walk. And a parent who punished each failed attempt, and each stumble and fall, would never help them to learn.

The Bible is full of examples of people who try to follow God's way, and who often fail – who make mistakes, who get it wrong, and who 'fall down' in their walk of faith – not just once, but many times. Just like a child learning to walk.

I once heard a scientist on the radio say something like this – for human beings, walking upright on two legs is actually 'a controlled state of falling over', and it is a wonder that we actually manage to stay upright and walk (most of the time). We have to constantly take the risk of falling, in every step, if we are going to walk at all.

So perhaps we could say that our walk of faith is actually, by the grace of God, 'a controlled state of failing' – often stumbling, sometimes falling, but slowly, with God's help, making some kind of progress. And we may have to be ready to take the risk of failing, if we are going to learn and grow in our journey of faith.

And that could be at least one of the reasons why, as the gospel tells us, Jesus welcomed children to be with him, and told his followers:

anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child
will never enter it. (Mark 10. 15)

Revd John Waller

Father God,
you love us even when we fall and fail,
and rejoice when we step out in faith:
help us to grow in faith and love
through Jesus Christ you Son.
Amen.

Bible readings: Genesis 2.18-24; Hebrews 1.1-4; 2.5-12; Mark 10.2-16

Story: 'Samuel Hears a Voice' (based on 1 Samuel chapter 3)