

Everyone Everywhere, Growing in Faith – Rhythms

Although the cycles and rhythms embedded into nature and just about every human endeavour are obvious to all, and so clearly essential for growth, is it not the case that contemporary culture has been resisting or neglecting the rhythms required for growth in faith? Reading scripture, attending public worship, and prayer are in competition with the many other things that fill our busy western lives. If, for Statistics for Mission, we are to define “regular attendance” for worship in the Church of England as once a month, I suspect our Christian forbears of seventy or more years ago might consider that the bar has been set rather low. Others might argue, however, that a less regulated modern Christian culture in the UK is a welcome departure from the norms of the past, giving to individuals more freedom now to find their personal expressions and rhythms of prayer, the reading of scripture, worship and service. But such individualism in the culture can be problematic, in that it can lead to fragmented Christian community.

The Apostle Paul told the Galatians “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law” (Galatians 5:18), which is perhaps a good starting point for evaluating the relationship of rhythms to growing in my faith. It is less about following rules and more about asking how my spiritual rhythms - or lack of them - contribute to my progress towards the abundant life promised by Jesus (John 10:10).

The Church of England has a great treasury of “rhythm gifts” that we can use and enjoy if we choose to do so. The liturgical calendar with its seasonal markers leads us purposefully through the Gospel story from Advent to Pentecost; the cycles of scripture readings and daily prayer can be for us a wonderful framework for the journey through the year, and the Eucharist calls us regularly “to lay aside every weight...looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2). Led by the Spirit, our worshipping communities can find these rhythms richly life-giving, especially if they are helped to access them in ways that are carefully adapted to their local context.

Thriving Christian communities have always recognised that aligning with others in our rhythms is essential for growth in faith and fruitfulness. Monastic communities have long had the spaces and the structures to align rhythms together, but local churches can develop these alignments, too. Can I find others in my worshipping community who will walk with me and share our rhythms together? Is there someone who will partner with me once a week or once a month for prayer? Is there a bible study group I can join - or start? Some people join with others - it might just be one or two - for Morning Prayer once or twice a week. Once the rhythm is established it doesn't feel as time-consuming as we might have feared and we can begin to see how much life it brings to us. Some of us might prefer to approach rhythms privately and individually, but perhaps for many of us, living and developing shared rhythms with others might be key to our growing in faith this year.

Reflection by Mark Felstead