

## A SPIRITUAL ANGLE ON MANAGING CHANGE

WITH BISHOP HELEN-ANN HARTLEY, BISHOP OF RIPON IN THE DIOCESE OF LEEDS, AND A TRUSTEE OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY NETWORK.

One of the first church services that I attended after weeks if not months of free Sundays (something of a novelty at first, but a challenge as I began to miss that routine) was at the church in Kettlewell, deep in the Dales. I had been invited there to lead a Eucharist and dedication of the work that had been done in the land around the churchyard. Specifically a new pilgrim trail with 'words in wood' and some new interpretation boards to help visitors understand the history and purpose of the land and building they were visiting. At the heart of it all was a new labyrinth. If you haven't encountered such a thing before, either pop online (if you can) and google 'labyrinth' or imagine, if you will, a series of paths mapped out on the ground. At first glance you might think it's a maze, and you'd be right in noting the similarity at least visually.



**Bishop Helen-Ann Hartley**

A key difference however is that there are no wrong turns and no dead-ends in your journey to the centre and then outwards again. Labyrinths are an ancient form of reflection; there are examples of the most basic form that date back 4000 years! That's quite remarkable when you think about it. When encountered on foot or by whatever means one uses to get about, it's simply a matter of making your way slowly inwards to the centre, and then out again (that bit is quite important; we have to go back to our lives at some point!).

By deliberately and intently putting one foot in front of the other you will find yourself slowing down and just for a few moments, your tread upon the earth is intentional in its movement. And then you reach the centre and stop for a few moments of stillness before heading back the way you came (hopefully transformed, even in the smallest of ways). You don't have to wait until you find a labyrinth, you can make one yourself, even just temporarily. Try it, and see what you come up with!

I offer that image (however you see it in your mind's eye) as an invitation to think about what resilience is, where it comes from, and how we sustain it in our (busy) daily lives? I've heard plenty anecdotes in recent weeks of how farming brings heaps of resilience learning to the table of life: 'we do distancing very well' (or words to that effect). While that is true, and generally raises a smile, I am also all too aware of the hidden effects of mental health and digital poverty. They aren't related of course, but feeling 'cut off' can be exacerbated when you've no way of switching on a computer or (in some places in the Dales I visit) accessing a mobile phone signal. Ways of connecting that we take for granted aren't an option for many people. These are further compounded by concern over the impact of weather and trade deals, and even in a story I heard while writing this piece of a farmer who lost thousands of pounds' worth of silage bales to mindless vandalism. It all takes its toll, and that's when we need to think about how we 'dig deep' and keep going?

I've spoken elsewhere about how farming does 'depth' well: both in its literal sense, planting and growing, but in another sense too through the generations that have worked the lands, cared for animals, provided our food and sought to regenerate the creation all around them. This is an ancient task, and despite various (apparent) advancements in robotic technology, I reckon it's a task that at its core will remain for generations to come. Sometimes this relationship to land is called being 'hefted', a word which is often applied to sheep farming, and specially to the sheep who are hefted to a place and carry that knowledge through their own generations.

When I lived and worked in Aotearoa New Zealand, I learnt from a similar concept, a Māori word *Tūrangawaewae* which means 'a place to stand'. For Māori in particular, it points back to origin, to the community or the place where they feel they are rooted. It's often the place to which they will return when they die, for funeral rites, celebration and lament. It's hard to put into words, but perhaps you can recognise the feeling you get when you arrive home, or to a place you know fondly and where you always feel secure? It may be that there are few such places in your own life story you can call to mind and give thanks for now?

One of the key elements of blessing the new labyrinth in Kettlewell was the invitation to take a bag of seeds and scatter them around the edges of the labyrinth's paths. In time, these seeds will grow into a meadow: a wild place (yes) but a place of regeneration, energy, and creativity too. I don't know exactly what that will look like yet, but I can picture it in my mind and it gives me a sense of peace; of the 'beyondness' of where I am now. One of my favourite poems is by a New Zealand poet called Glenn Colquhoun. He's a medical doctor as well as a published poet, and from one of his poems is the line: 'The art of walking upright here, is the art of using both feet. One is for holding on. One is for letting go'.

The path to resilience is a bit like that I think. It's messy and complicated and unpredictable, but ultimately it's about getting to a different place mentally, a place where you have reached the centre of the labyrinth, and from which you bravely take steps to take forward in life as you journey out again, and into whatever is next on the list of 'stuff to do'.

Travel well.

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