

AUDIO RETREAT

Advent Retreat 2022 | Week Two | Endings

Advent – in its starkness - is a time to be in touch with inner emptiness and need. It is a season of longing and expectation directed towards Christ, revealed as God-with-us, *Emmanuel*. It reminds us that the beginning is the meeting of our longing and God's generous giving. For we do not make ourselves: we create the space for our making. Advent reminds us that everything is gift and that God goes on creating – if we only allow the room. Tiredness, restlessness, the inability to bring about meaningful change become the open door to God if we turn that way.

This week we are thinking about how endings makes room for new beginnings: mushrooms sprout from decaying wood, fallen leaves release their goodness into the ground to nourish next year's growth. You might like to go for a walk this week and look for examples of this in the world around you.



Image by Andreas from Pixabay.com

As each day this week ends, try finding space at the end of it to reflect on what has happened. Begin by asking God to be with you, and to show you what he wants you to see. What are the things to give thanks for? What are the things to be sorry for? What needs to come to an end? What can you hand over to God and let go of?



Image: National Gallery

Harmen Steenwick's 'Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life' (above) was painted to encourage people to contemplate death. The books, upturned lute, the beautiful shell, and exotic Japanese sword cannot detract from the fact this is a painting about endings: the lamp wick is snuffed out and smoking, the pocket watch reminds us of time passing, and the skull occupies a prominent place. But the shaft of light reminds us that 'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1:5). Where is the light of Christ illuminating the things that need to come to an end in your life? Where is it shining on new ventures just beginning?

The Bible is full of deaths and births, endings and beginnings. You may have already have favourite story, or you may like to reflect on one of these:

Joshua 1: 1-6: After Moses' death, Joshua begins to lead the Israelites towards the Promised Land

Isaiah 43: 18-19: God's promise of renewal

Luke 2: 29-32: Simeon acknowledges his end as he sees the new life which the baby Jesus brings to the world

John 19:30: Jesus' earthly work comes to an end on the cross

Revelation 21: 1-4: A vision of the end of this world and the beginning of the new creation

Reflecting on endings and death can bring painful feelings to the surface. You may find it helpful to do this with a friend or spiritual companion. There are also links to organisations which can help you with your journey through grief at the following webpage:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals/after-funeral/journey-through-grief>