

Dear Friends,

As I write we have September within our sights. This is what William Wordsworth wrote two hundred and five years ago:

SEPTEMBER 1815

*While not a leaf seems faded; while the fields,
with ripening harvest prodigally fair, in brightest sunshine bask;
This nipping air, sent from some distant clime where Winter wields
His icy scimitar, a foretaste yields of bitter change, and bids the flowers beware;
And whispers to the silent birds, 'Prepare against the threatening foe your trustiest shields'.
For me, who under kindlier laws belong to Nature's tuneful quire, this rustling dry
Through leaves yet green, and yon crystalline sky, announce a season potent to renew,
'Mid frost and snow, the instinctive joys of song, and nobler cares than listless summer knew'.*

When I found this poem, it reminded me of what we all face in September; that month of new beginnings, the end of the summer and in particular this year, a month clouded with uncertainties.

Winter with *'its icy scimitar'* will come with a nip in the air from the Arctic perhaps. But this we know about. What is more hidden, more invidious, are things we don't have any warning signs of, like an unexpected heart attack, stroke or accident, before it hits us. As we try to get our heads around the uncertainties of the future, that crippling emotion "fear" can fill our hearts. Covid 19 has made and continues to make us fearful.

How often do we say: 'I am afraid?' (or 'I am worried' which may mean the same thing). Not just for ourselves but also for our loved ones, friends and neighbours. These fears can cover a lack of job, an unpaid mortgage payment, sickness, even a death, and much more. Dare I suggest that fear grips us more than we are prepared to say?

So, I wonder, what are *'our trustiest shields to prepare against the threatening foe'* ?

In the last 6 weeks we have been looking at Matthew's gospel in our Benefice Zoom services. In many of the stories, those around Jesus were afraid. Afraid of what they could not understand: walking on the water, a miracle healing and Jesus' love for a foreigner (an enemy of the people). In nearly every case they were told one of three things: to believe, to trust or to come to him.

These are invitations for those who believe – to take a step of faith, to reach out to the one who was and is and will be - always and everywhere. But the truth is everyone needs some sort of weapon which we can use against rational or irrational fears. And these could be anything from acts of kindness and generosity, to care and concern, from a personal stance in self-isolating to offering of support and encouragement. For all of us in these dark days we have the opportunity to give love in whatever form to disturb the fears and send them running.

How many of you learnt that wonderful hymn at Primary School: 'When a Knight won his spurs'? I will leave you with the last verse:

*Let faith be my shield and let joy be my steed 'gainst the dragons of anger and the ogres of greed,
And let me set free with the sword of my youth from the castle of darkness the power of the truth.*

God bless, keep safe and thank you for all you are doing.

Dodie

Church Openings

St James' - Woodcott: by arrangement

St Peter's - St Mary Bourne: all day on Tuesdays and Thursdays

St Andrew's - Hurstbourne Priors: Wednesdays and Saturdays mid-morning to early evening

St Nicholas' - Longparish: all day on Sunday