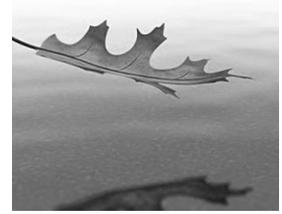


Greeting the November blues

Autumn often make us feel a little melancholy. Summer's over for another year, the leaves are falling, the garden's dying and the days are getting shorter and darker.



We move into a minor key in our church services too. All Souls reminds us of our own mortality and sometimes brings back the sharp or lingering sadness of bereavement. Remembrance Sunday is clothed with the colours of sacrifice and the sad truth that mankind never seems to learn.

What do we do with these feelings, when they come? And they can come at any time of year. It's tempting to push them away by finding some other focus - buying a sofa for Christmas, or booking a holiday for next year.

When it comes to our mental health we are beginning to learn that suppressing our feelings is never the answer. Thankfully more people - even in the macho world of sport - are having the courage to be open about the depression or anxiety that they live with at times. And by sharing this, they are helping the many others whose lives go through times of deep darkness.

Not all of us will face such challenges, but whenever melancholy comes it is good to begin by acknowledging it - to say 'hello' to it. This is part of life. We cannot pretend that life is all smiles and happiness. If we do, we may actually miss out on something profound.

I was struck by this last month when I shared in a very sad time, taking the service for my godson Chris, who had ended his life at a time of extreme anxiety. I felt very much for his parents, and his friends - but I was also aware of the deep love which was made visible through this tragedy. As I wrote, 'Loss is terrible, but it does uncover love in a beautiful way.'

Kahil Gibran writes about the connection between joy and sorrow: "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight."

The music of the blues it is part of the richness of our human experience. And Christmas is not just the chance to light up the winter darkness. It is a thanksgiving that in Jesus we have one who is with us both in joy and in sorrow: 'and he feeleth for our sadness, and he shareth in our gladness'

blessings, Simon Witcombe