

*Take me often from the tumult of things
into Thy presence.*

*There show me what I am
and what thou hast purposed me to be.
Then hide me from Thy tears.*

St Hilda of Whitby

Well it has been a tumultuous time for all of us. So much to think about. So much to plan. So much to expect. And now so much to learn together. We probably could all do with some rest and space for reflection! And so, as it happens, we have the ideal season for both - for the season of Lent is now upon us.

I came across St Hilda's prayer as I was preparing for our move. Many of you will know this prayer very well, I expect. It seems to be a good prayer for Lent. And especially so for those of us who are people who find it hard to reflect and even harder to find rest. So here is a Lent challenge for each of us and all of us together. Let us encourage each other by sharing stories of rest and reflection this Lent. Let us learn from each other how the words of this prayer ring true in our lives.

How do you rest? Where do you go to withdraw a bit? It may be that you need to give your body rest because your life is physically demanding. But it may be that you find it much harder to give your mind and soul and spirit a rest. Perhaps you, like me, are a member of the 3am prayer fellowship? Perhaps you, like me, blow life's problems out of all proportion at that desert time where dawn is far off and dark thoughts envelope?

Do you allow yourself to have times where God can take you out of the tumult of things? Do you feel guilty if you stop for a moment in the day and sit and 'waste time' watching a tree sway in the wind or a squirrel munching on the bird feed? Do you have an endless list of things running through your mind that keeps you in the tumult of things?

Or perhaps, rather, you long to be in the thick of things and would like a little more tumult in your life? Maybe you have had to let go of responsibilities or health has begun to slow you down? Maybe the thing that takes away your peace is not in fact too much activity, but too little - isolation even, and loneliness.

What does St Hilda's prayer teach us in these times of busy-ness and loneliness? It is not an easy prayer. It is one that opens the pray-er up to new possibilities about who we really are. It is not an anxious sort of prayer - the sort that sends you into a spiral of self-indulgent self-examination. No, it is a prayer that opens the pray-er up to God's agenda, God's wooing of us, God's persistent challenge to turn around and face the Trinity unashamedly.

For, it is God who takes the initiative with us if we will just have ears to hear and eyes to see. It is God who will show us who we truly are - wounded but wonderfully made. And it is God who will show us who we are becoming, who God has purposed us to be.

St Hilda asked that her Lord would 'often' take her out of the tumult of her day to learn who she truly was and what God longed for her to become. Let us follow her example and seek times in God's presence as often as possible this Lent. And let us encourage each other with what we learn together.