

For me, this time of the year with Easter and the Resurrection is when everything points to hope and new life. There is new life all around us – the sight of playful lambs, birds nesting and trees blossoming is so uplifting. Spirits are raised; there is a new energy. People start smiling more; the dark, cold and gloomy winter days and nights have passed. Somehow despite those harsh winters when the ground is bare and rock solid as iron this rejuvenation in spring continues unabated in the cycle of life.

After this past year with all the Covid troubles, this renewal, this hope of new life seems more crucial than ever before. Renewal continues often unseen – in people’s hearts and minds. The seeds of faith can lie dormant for years then burst into new life and true love for Christ. The Resurrection of Jesus fills us with wonder and praise for our Lord that no words can truly express.

During the reflection at the end of the recent Corbridge talks on the Northern Saints Trails, Sam Lohead mentioned the wonderful poetry of George Herbert (1593-1633) He was born in Wales and loved writing poetry but sadly died of consumption when only thirty nine having spent the last four years of his life as rector of a rural parish near Salisbury. Not long before he died, Herbert sent some poems to a good friend of his, Nicholas Ferrar telling him to publish them only if he thought they might “turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul” In 1633 his poems were indeed published in a book called “The Temple” and they had a massive influence on other writers of the seventeenth century and beyond. After the talk I looked at his writing and came across a beautiful poem called The Flower.

It’s a poem about resurrected life. The writer has rediscovered God’s presence after a time of “spiritual barrenness” and he compares the ups and downs of a person’s spiritual experience to the changes in the life of a flower. During winter the writer’s spirit has been buried underground as a bulb is with no sign of apparent life but in the spring there is a miraculous renewal. Herbert is entranced by the wonder of what is going on unseen under the ground in the cold days of winter and then by the joyful new and emerging life in spring. He now gets fresh inspiration for writing but recognises that the mysteries of life cannot be properly expressed in words. He sees God as all powerful and steadfast. He not only created the world but is constantly renewing not only visible life outside, in the gardens and countryside but alongside this He is also constantly renewing the world of the human spirit. This continual renewing of life and spirit leaves Herbert in a state of utter incredulity.

There is so much to think and meditate upon in his words – the miracle of resurrection is the greatest of all miracles and one which fills us with such deep love for Christ and every hope for God’s blessings in the future.

THE FLOWER

O, How Fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean

Are thy returns! Ev’n as the flowers in spring;

“To which, besides their own demean,

“ The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.

Grief melts away

Like snow in May

As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shrivel'd heart
Could have recover'd greenesse? It was gone

Quite underground, as flowers depart

To see their mother-root, when they have blown;

Where they together

All the hard weather,

Dead to the world, keep house unknown

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell

And up to heaven in an houre;

Making a chiming of a passing-bell

We say amisse,

This or that is

Thy word is all, if we could spell.

O that I once past changing were;
Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can wither !

Many a spring I shoot up fair,

Offring at heav'n , growing and groning thither:

Nor doth my flower

Want a spring -showre,

My sinnes and I joining together

But while I grow to a straight line;
Still upwards bent, as if heav'n were mine own
Thy anger comes, and I decline:

What frost to that? What pole is not the zone,
Where all things burn
When thou dost turn,
And the least frown of thine is shown?

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing: O my onely light,
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love
To make us see we are but flowers that glide:
Which when we once more can finde and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us, where to hide.
Who would be more,
Swelling through store
Forfeit their paradise by their pride.

The Flower is on you tube set to music by Alec Roth - the Choir of Salisbury Cathedral