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The Ven. Emma Sykes writes...



I have been reflecting recently on “transitions”. This is not surprising as in the last few months I have encountered (and still encountering) a lot of changes. These range from being a Parish Priest to becoming an Archdeacon, moving house from Birmingham to East Derbyshire and entering a stage of life where our young adult children are leaving home.

In his book “Transitions: Making sense of life changes”, William Booth points out that every transition has three stages, an ending, a neutral zone and a new beginning. Often we overlook the ‘neutral zone’ we try and rush through it or ignore it, but it is in the transition in and out of these stages and the disorientation that we feel where the growth in understanding and ability to respond well comes.

Emma Inneson’s latest book “Middling” is all about this, learning to live within the tensions, especially in a polarised world and to not see the middle “as a place of accident, mediocrity or stagnation, but as a place of faithfulness, authenticity and hope.”

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, it only took three days before the complex reality of their new situation started to dawn on them. They had escaped Pharaoh’s oppression only to find the water they had to drink was bitter. Moses cries out to the Lord, the Lord intervenes, the water becomes sweet and they are led to Elim, a place that has an abundance of water (Exodus 15:27).

A month and a half later, the Israelites are grumbling again, this time they are hungry, yearning for the ‘fleshpots’ in Egypt where they ate their fill. The Lord provides manna for them to gather each day. Challenge, hardship, grumbling, desperate cries, God intervenes, reminds them of the covenant he made with them, responds to their needs, and on the cycle goes. Their disorientating middle goes on... for forty years.

I would suggest being a follower of Christ is to be in a permanent state of transition, in a permanent middle place. As a community of believers, the church, the ‘Ekklesia’ we are called out to proclaim the gospel, a gospel of hope and yet, it is not easy or comfortable. It requires us to live in the now of a future hope that we do not yet see.

Anyone who has made that step to follow Christ into the unknown will know it is both compelling and joyful but also disorientating and bewildering. It’s a cross shaped place of tension. To navigate it well, we need the one who knew all about cross shapes, whose life, death, resurrection and ascension gives us not just a pattern to follow, but a deep prayerful relationship that gives wisdom and courage when the challenges arise.

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