

Trinity Rogation, Gate Farm 2021

In a few moments, some of us are going to connect with a time-honoured rural tradition. We're going on a Rogation procession. For those of you who are new to Rogation, a few words of explanation.

Rogation comes from the Latin verb, Rogare, meaning, 'to ask'. During our Rogation service, we'll walk around the farm, **asking** God's blessing as we go.

By a strange quirk of Covid restrictions, our delayed Rogation activity is happening on Trinity Sunday. Needless to say, that's a new one on me. But actually, what a gift. As we walk, we are invited to deepen our connection with the Creator God: the one who called us out of darkness and chaos into the community of a loving creation. Our blessings in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit draw our human activity ever deeper into the Trinitarian community.

Malcolm Guite has written a poem for Trinity Sunday. It won't be everyone's thing, but just for a few moments you might like to let Malcolm's sonnet for the Trinity wash over you:

In the Beginning, not in time or space,
 But in the quick before both space and time,
 In Life, in Love, in co-inherent Grace,
 In three in one and one in three, in rhyme,
 In music, in the whole creation story,
 In His own image, His imagination,
 The Triune Poet makes us for His glory,
 And makes us each the other's inspiration.
 He calls us out of darkness, chaos, chance,
 To improvise a music of our own,
 To sing the chord that calls us to the dance,
 Three notes resounding from a single tone,
 To sing the End in whom we all begin;
 Our God beyond, beside us and within.

(From, Sounding the Seasons' by Malcolm Guite)

With that sense of God beyond, beside us and within, we'll walk and we'll dwell at places where we can see the important features. James will explain why they're important for the farm, for food production and for the environment. And then we'll ask God's blessing on them. We'll be connecting to an activity that rural and agricultural communities have valued for generations. But we're not simply following a quaint tradition. This is important stuff.

In times past, most rural communities recognised that what happened in the fields was a matter of life and death. Life could be fragile. The emerging crops of Rogationtide, would be the food that sustained life during the year ahead. The good land of God's creation held the sustaining potential. Affirming God's creative power and connecting with God's energising spirit of wisdom and inspiration, were key elements in agricultural practice. The words of the Rogation blessings expressed these sustaining connections between God's creation and human endeavour.

In 2021, we find ourselves at another juncture where the life of our planet is fragile.

We have a rapidly growing global population, presently 7.8 billion people. To put that growth into context, it took over 2 million years of human prehistory and history for the world's population to reach 1 billion and only 200 years more to reach 7 billion.

Producing the food and energy to sustain the people of the world is a huge challenge. It's putting a tremendous strain on the earth's resources. This fragile situation has brought us to a crossroads. I, and many of the farmers I meet, believe that agriculture offers a road to many of the solutions.

I have a favourite verse from the book of Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah said,
*Stand at the crossroads and look,
Ask for the ancient paths,
Ask where the good way is, and walk in it
And you will find rest for your souls. Jer 6.16*

Today we're going to walk. We're going to stand and look, we might ask questions of ourselves, our lives and our relationship with the land and the food it produces. We'll look for the good ways and ask God's blessing upon them.

Before we set off, I'm going to ask you to take a few moments to prepare yourself for this walk. This isn't any old walk in the countryside. This is a walk of blessing that holds great potential, so let's prepare ourselves to be people of blessing.

Three elements might help us here.

First of all you might like to focus on the word of God. People of faith tend to hold the word of God deep in their souls. We've just heard the parable of the sower. Its an obvious gospel reading for Rogation: the good soil, the growing wheat, the hope of a bountiful harvest. But Jesus was using this agricultural image as an illustration. He was saying, 'Just imagine your soul as good, rich nutritious soil. Into that soil, the word of God and my teaching takes root, really takes root. And if you nurture and feed the good rich soil of faith, you will grow to inhabit the world in the way I intend.'

A Rogation walk connects us deeply to God's gift of creation. You might like to reflect on seven of the simplest words of creation scripture. At each stage of creation, we're told in Genesis,

'And God saw that it was good'.

Today we connect with God's delight in creation, in the great goodness of the gift he gave us. Let yourself see and truly enjoy the goodness of creation.

And secondly, be thankful. Any good gift deserves thanks. As you walk the farm today, I can guarantee you will find much to be thankful for. Let your hearts be filled with thanks.

And thirdly, take time to think about how you walk. This isn't a fitness hike, it's a Rogation walk. If you've walked me before, you'll know that I encourage you to saunter. The word saunter comes from the French phrase, 'a la sainte terre', to the holy ground. Let's walk slowly, gently, with reverence for the good earth. This ground is the home to the community of creation. And it's the life-sustaining source of food for all. There's a holiness in that.

So, let's saunter.