

A straight path

Gillian Cooper *reflects on*
Jeremiah 31:7-14

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God, through Jeremiah, promises the exiled people a straight path home. No tripping up. Water brooks to drink from along the way. Why? Because they have been ransomed. God has bought them back. Their Lord has redeemed them.

It is not easy being God's people and in some ways the story the Old Testament tells is a tragic one. Although it begins with rescue from

slavery and a journey to freedom, it is a story of failure and misunderstanding on the part of the people, and of God's sorrow and anger.

That is our story too. Christianity's story begins with salvation from slavery, yet God's people since the coming of Christ have shown just as much failure and misunderstanding. And we sense God's sorrow and anger with us, as a people and as individuals.

And yet there is the promise, the promise made real by Christmas, and appropriately remembered and celebrated at the beginning of another year. As God's ancient people discovered, there is always redemption. God's gift of salvation through Jesus may be undeserved, but it is certain. God does not give up on us. There are water brooks for our thirst and straight paths home to God. ☺

Forgive us, O God, when we misunderstand and fail you. Help us to know ourselves, and to acknowledge our need of you. Give us the water of your blessing and show us the way to walk, that we may be your people in the world. Amen.

The Church Fathers

Part II – martyrdom and misogyny

by Richard Gunning

The fact that Christianity was a capital offence seems to have encouraged some of the early Fathers to provoke the authorities. Ignatius (c. 35-108) ordered that his friends should not try to obtain his release from Roman captivity, as he wanted to suffer as Jesus had. When his friend Polycarp

(c. 69-155) was hauled before the authorities and asked to renounce his faith, he refused to revile God. He was burned at the stake.

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) was born into a pagan family before converting to Christianity. Travelling widely, he spread the word that Christianity was the "true philosophy". He was executed as a martyr in Rome.

Of all the early Fathers, Tertullian (c. 160-225) was probably the most fierce and uncompromising. A strict disciplinarian, ascetic and misogynist, he was never martyred and, because of his extreme views and heresy, he fell away from the Church and has never been called a saint. ☹

New Year resolutions

Ready to go?

by Barbara Mosse

Well – how are you doing so far? Are those well-intentioned New Year resolutions still intact, or are they beginning to look a little frayed round the edges? We may well have enjoyed – perhaps a little too much! – all the delicious food and abundance of chocolate treats and other goodies available over Christmas. But now we are into January and the magazines

are full of diets and exercise regimes.

It's easy to be a bit sceptical about the idea of New Year resolutions. In one way first January is just another day; in another, it really does feel as if we're turning over a new leaf and have the chance of a fresh start. What "new beginnings" might God be prompting you to make this new year of 2021? Over the next few weeks we shall consider some of the new beginnings in the Bible and the people who make them. ☺

Barbara is a writer and retired Anglican priest with a number of years' experience in chaplaincies (prison, university, community mental health, hospital) and theological education.

“The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), writer and theologian