

Stir up Sunday – Collect for today

‘Stir up we beseech thee O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded, through Jesus Christ our Lord.’

I wonder how many of you will be going home to make your Christmas pudding after the service. Using up the last of the ingredients and adding a silver coin to the mixture. Traditionally today is the day families get together and stir up the pudding. I will not be making one – if I did it would probably be as hard as a rock.

When I was asked to do the sermon slot I agreed on condition I could choose a theme. Today is the last day of the interregnum and the end of another era at St Peter’s. The last Sunday before Advent when we begin preparations for the birth of Jesus. Endings...yes but they are also beginnings. Last day of the interregnum before Simon begins as our vicar. Stir up Sunday signalling the approach of Advent.

Endings and beginnings. Without endings there can be no beginnings. At times we are blinded to the beginning created by the ending. I tell you now of 2003 – my annus horribilis or so I thought. Andy had left St Peter’s and Julia began as our vicar in 2002. There I was at the end of my career – I wasn’t ready! A new beginning beckoned but I couldn’t see it.

With the ending at St Andrew’s School my life took a different turn. A helping hand from Sue Windross who was headteacher at Tyssen Community School provided an opportunity for me to start again doing display throughout the school. I really enjoyed doing that but it wasn’t long before I was teaching again. I retired after 8 years having spent the last three as SENCo. My grandson Caleb was born that year. I was able to look after him as I was a lady of leisure! Again you see an ending allowing a new beginning. Now Caleb was five and in school.

Exactly five years later to the day, St Peter's Day, 29 June 2017, Dorothy was born. When God gives you a new beginning it starts with an ending.

Let me take you back to another kind of ending – I had a conversation about death with a man. This man was stabbed and died 3 times. Not once. Not twice. Three times! Once on the ground. Once in the ambulance and again in the hospital. Each time he said it did not feel like the end...only a beginning. This experience has given him a different outlook. What is in the now here is important. Not what we didn't or did yesterday, not what we plan to do tomorrow. Whatever it is, if it is hard decisions have to be made.

Do you remember hearing about Lazarus a few weeks ago. That is one of the most striking ending and beginning. Lazarus had been dead four days but he was called out from his grave. When Jesus was talking to Martha, Jesus said "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and he whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

My brother Anthony, Tony as he was known, died very suddenly 21 July this year. My granddaughter Etta was born 16 July. A beginning and an ending. I give grateful thanks that there is another grandchild Luca Anthony. My brother's name lives on in him. Every ending happens to create a beginning. Tomorrow some of us will travel to Norfolk for Sue's funeral mass. Her beginning in her Father's house.

I read somewhere that Bob Marley said, 'Beginnings are usually scary and endings are usually sad but it is everything in between that makes it all worth living.'

Let me end with John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life. The greatest ending and beginning. The crucifixion and resurrection.