The Way of Surrender

How much I want to arrange and rearrange my life! We talk and sing so freely about surrendering all to God, but how difficult this is in reality. We walk through much of our lives with a clenched fist. To open that fist is to put our trust freely in God, which I suspect most of us find hard to do.

Even when we pray, if we're honest about what's going on within us, we hope God will arrange things in the way we want. However, life throws many curveballs and difficulties, some of which may usher in circumstances that are here to stay despite our desire for things to be different. For instance, there are times when God's will can't yet be experienced as consolation: when we experience loss or grief of any kind, or when we are ill or diagnosed with a life-changing illness. Or again, when a relationship goes wrong, leaving us wounded. Such circumstances don't go away.

So we find ourselves living with uncertainty that can't be magically removed by prayer. Christ experienced pain, suffering, fear in Gethsemane and his passion. As it was for him, these things have to be gone through despite our desire to move beyond them, and before we reach our 'Easter'. Surrender in the end comes about when we entrust this very desire to God. We entrust to the One who is unchanging and faithful in love that lies beneath all circumstances in which we find ourselves.

At the beginning of this year the word that God gave me was 'Here'. And I have to be reminded again and again that I can only find God in the very circumstances I would so like to change. Peace, however, does not come by trying to flee from the things I was struggling with. Surrender is not the same as resignation, which is a state of mind telling us nothing can be done. In contrast, surrender is trusting in God's grace in the here and now, even when the final outcome is unclear. St Frances de Sale spoke about how we are constantly tempted to live 'ahead of grace'. Surrender is about who we can trust in all the circumstances life brings; when we slowly unclench and open our hands to say to God, 'Here I am. Here is my life and here is what I am carrying right now.'

So, in the end surrender is not about giving up in resignation, but learning to come to a place of trust; and in this finding freedom. Such movements of surrender are not something that happens once and for ever. All of us, I suspect, know we quickly pick up again the emotions we have laid down and released! The need to repeat will always be there; the slow learning of release and laying down, picking up again, only to lay it down once more. I am reminded of the words of the psalmist, 'But I by your great love can come into your house.' (Psalm 51:7) Like him, we don't give up and berate ourselves, but rather call to mind that because of God's great love we are not consumed, and that God remains forever faithful, even as we dodge in and out of the here and now.

Into the silence

'But even as I fear my hopes are vain
My saviour comes, his love revives my hope.
I feel him search my wounds, deal with my pain
And offer me again the healing cup.'

Malcolm Guite Psalm 24, *David's Crown* p.24

Leaving the silence

… Some mornings, through no effort
of our own, we are gathered into the peace
of the patient lichen and the still pond.
It's the difference between breathing
and being breathed, between asking for grace
and finding grace has been asking for us.

Rosemary Wahtola Trommer *Surrender* from *All the Honey* p.85