

Bogs and mountains**Bible readings: Psalm 40 and Psalm 125 (and a bit of Isaiah: ch.40 vv.30-31)**

*I waited patiently for the Lord: he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the desolate pit, and out of the miry bog,
And set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.
He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God:
Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord. (Ps 40.1-4)*

Miry bogs are my least favourite bit of walking. There's a lovely path above the Duddon valley in Cumbria — great views, but definitely not for wet weather. What looks like nice green grass is spongy and wet, and before you know it you're guttered to the eyebrows. (It's not called the 'Long Mire' for nothing!). I hate that feeling when nothing seems secure any more, and you're slithering and sliding on every step. What a relief to find a scrap of solid rock to put your feet on. (U2 fans might like to know that Bono based a song on this Psalm. It's called "40". Geddit?)

As Robin reminded us, the hardest part of a pilgrimage (or a walk) doesn't necessarily come at the beginning, when you're all pumped up with adrenalin and ready to give it a go — or at the end, when you can see where you're going. The hardest part is in the middle, when your feet haven't yet hardened and your muscles are still protesting, and the end is nowhere in sight. That's when the rocks seem craggier and the bogs seem boggier and you can't imagine how you're ever going to get through it. "My heart fails me," the psalmist says in Ps 40.13. (I struck a particular boggy patch this week trying to get my very low-tech brain to assimilate all these high-tech IT skills why do they ALL require yet another password?!).

Psalm 125 is one of the pilgrim psalms, the "Songs of ascent" that pilgrims sang on their way to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. A reminder that we are approaching Holy Week, when Jesus entered Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross. You get the feeling that these pilgrims were struggling with the "ascent" bit — Jerusalem seems to be at the top of a very long hill that goes on and on, and you can't imagine getting to the end of it. Yet when you stop and draw breath, the mountains are reassuring too. They're the solid rock our feet crave: they remind pilgrims of the protective shield of God's love surrounding his people:

*As the mountains stand round about Jerusalem,
so the Lord stands round about his people,
from this time forth for evermore. (Ps 125.2)*

"Prayer turns a quarantine into a pilgrimage," the preacher said on Sunday morning. When we "wait upon God" — crying out to tell him our fears, turning to him in trust and hope — our feet find solid ground: *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run, and not be weary: they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40.30-31).*

God bless, Loveday