

Ascend Publication: "Flourishing in the Desert"

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www.placeforhope.org.uk

Place for Hope (www.placeforhope.org.uk) is one resource within the faith communities in Scotland offering support, companionship and skilled facilitation through times of change, despair and discord, supporting all our faith communities to flourish.

I was once given a Jericho Rose. A seemingly dead plant, the Jericho Rose is fragile, dry and crisp to the touch: a bit like a ball of dried vermicelli! It is a plant that is found in desert landscapes, usually the middle east or the high desert plains of Latin America. This flower, also called 'the miracle plant', rolls in the wind like a dust ball until it finds an oasis – a pond, or source of water from which it can drink deeply. And in that place of new life, this seemingly dead plant comes to life. It puts down roots, opens out it's fragile fronds, flowers, and drinks, bringing new life to what once seemed dead.



It flourishes.

For a plant to flourish in the desert it needs resilience, persistence, and trust that a source of new life will, eventually, despite all the odds, manifest itself.

What, or who offers such new life to you in a time of aridity, seeming death and possible despair?

Perhaps it's worth considering for a moment what it feels like to be in a time of *not* flourishing – perhaps you are in such a place in your ministry at the moment. I have certainly experienced times in my ministry when the source of my faith has felt very far away. I have felt fragile and vulnerable inside, and in desperate need of spiritual nourishment. For you this might be a time of despair and lack of the essentials for life: light, food, water, relationship. This might be a time when all goodness seems gone, when life feels empty and meaningless. A time of not flourishing might be a time when, even though the motions of life are visible, the heart of living is gone.

In my ministry I picture my calling, or vocation as a yellow thread. When I am in such a space of despair, depression, or lacking in vitality, I imagine this yellow thread being almost invisible: fragile, brittle, ready to be broken at the slightest touch – a little like the Jericho Rose when it is far from an oasis in the desert.

And what is the desert, or the context in which this fragile ministry is found? The context for many of us in ministry today is one of decline, multiple changes, transitions that are painful and sometimes discordant, disagreement over core theological concerns. The wider context in which we find ourselves may seem barren spiritually, with a world obsessed by greed and power while millions starve and refugee camps grow; a context of hospitality for some with rejection and exclusion for others.

How in this context, and with these challenges can we flourish and grow? What are the sources on which we can draw not only to find inner flourishing, but to support our churches and the faith of all to flourish also?

Firstly, faith can flourish when we are resilient through change and transition. Resilience doesn't necessarily mean visible strength. The Jericho Rose, which survives the desert in the midst of storms

and wind finds resilience in fragility, strength in weakness, adapting to the landscape around while holding on to the spark of life and faith in the core that will not be diminished. What is your inner resilience in stormy times?

Secondly, ours is a faith predicated on trust in new life. We believe in Jesus Christ, one life lived, dead, buried and alive once more. Living well with death, and distinguishing this from despair, is part of a faith-full, flourishing life and ministry. And so as we minister, we move towards change, transition, challenge and letting go of the old in order to embrace the new. Letting go of the old is very often painful, difficult and conflictual – so we don't brush this off with winsome ease. Most of us need support and companionship and gentle nudging of petrified positions in order to move through change into new life. The Jericho Rose has to move on when the oasis has run dry, trusting that a new source of life will appear. Where do you find hope and flourishing, in the cycle of death and new life in your ministry?

For a plant to flourish in the desert it needs resilience, persistence, and trust that a source of new life will, eventually, despite all the odds, manifest itself. Just as the yellow thread of ministry can feel pale and wan in times of despair, so it can be vibrant, pulsing, almost aching with life when in a time of flourishing. Recognising when we are vibrant, pulsing with life and flourishing and moving towards that space, while noticing at the same time what diminishes life and leads us to despair is part of the ongoing discernment of all those in ministry. We each will have our own oasis, the space in which we can flourish when the conditions are right – so that what once seemed dead, irretrievably lost, or hidden can once again flourish and grow.