

The Grace of Dependence

In general we take great pride in our self-sufficiency, our ability to cope with what the world throws at us. When asked how we are coping we will respond 'I'm fine', 'I don't need any help' or other phrases which imply that we are in control.

There is also that fear of 'being a burden' to friends or relatives. This drive to independence has been inherent over many generations to such an extent that we almost worship our independence; something to cherish in defiance of the world. We continue stubbornly on our journey and sometimes it can be too late to change course and things can go drastically wrong. How hard it is to admit that we cannot cope.

I believe this is where the 'grace of dependence' comes into play. In my early professional life, I remember a very independent older lady who refused to accept she had a sight threatening eye disease. It was only when her independence was challenged, the threat that she would not be able to go out and do her shopping and care for herself was made real, did she accept referral for preventative treatment.

I too had to learn to be dependent on others. When my first wife became disabled, I became a primary carer trying to balance full time work, professional activities and being a churchwarden. I had support from professional carers but also learned to ask members of our church family to step in and provide care for my wife to allow me to fulfil my other obligations. I learned to ask for help, not to be frightened to ask and not to feel a failure because I could not cope. This understanding of my need for others was a big learning curve and hence I began to see the 'grace of dependence' as a gift from God.

As Christians we should not fear dependence as we are created dependent beings. Jesus told us that he was the living bread and the living water; the provider of all that we need for fulfilling lives.

In this time of lockdown, many people have had to accept their need for others to provide the basics for life and many businesses have become not only providers but also deliverers. Many local groups have formed to supply or deliver basic needs and to provide a friendly voice when needed. All of these might seem to threaten our independence.

In fact, all of these things remind us that we are dependant beings; to remind us that we need other people; to remind us of that second great commandment of Jesus 'to love our neighbour as ourselves'.

As John Donne wrote “No man is an island, entire of self”. We need to encompass the grace of dependence, giving with love, not expecting reward and receiving with gratitude and thankfulness.

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