

Saturday 29th September



All I have ever been...

I spent some time this week at the local sculpture park, where there is a new exhibition focusing on trees. The guide explained how the artist had peeled back the layers of the trees to see the trees that they were before, the tree of the past. Each ring of the tree was a different phase of its life and, to put it in his words, the tree was made up of every tree that it had ever been. Quite literally, each ring showed part of the life of the tree that had now passed.

I have spent the last few days in a lot of funeral ministry, and those words from the guide at the sculpture park struck me as true about us as well. As I have listened to grieving families talk about their departed loved ones, they don't focus on the last few days of life, they focus on the memories, of who their loved one has been as well as who they were at the end. This particularly struck me when visiting a widow who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, whose memories of her beloved husband were not of the elderly, sick man he was at the end, but of the teenager she met, the young man she had married and the father of her children.

In many ways, we are like those trees: we are made up of every person we have ever been – we are still the five year old, the teenager, the young adult, and so on. We may not really resemble the people we once were, but they are still part of us, deep within. We may not like who we were in the past, and that's ok – like the tree, we have grown and changed. I thank God for who I was in the past, for who I am now, and – though I do not know what I will be like – for the person I will be in the future.

Two hymns that help me to reflect on God's journeying with me through all the phases of my life are *Lord for the Years* by Timothy Dudley-Smith, which speaks of God being with us throughout the years, and *Lord of all Hopefulness* by Jan Struther, which could be interpreted as God being with us at different times of day, but also in the different seasons of our lives.

God of all time

I thank you for this new day, for its blessings and challenges

I thank you for walking with me during the early days, when all was new

I thank you for standing by me in the difficult days, when the trials seemed too much to bear

I thank you for being with me in all the joys and blessings that have enriched my life

I thank you for the days we will share together, whatever joys and challenges they bring

I thank you, for the person I was, the person I am and the person I may one day grow to be

God of all time, I praise you

Amen