

17th August 2020

Accepting

**“God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.”**

Reinhold Niebuhr, Book of Prayers and Services for the Armed Forces

You might be surprised to learn that “The Serenity Prayer” quoted above is not in its original form. When it was first written by American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, it asked for courage first, and specifically for changing things that *must* be changed, not things that *can* be changed, and read:

Father, give us courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what cannot be helped, and insight to know the one from the other.

The prayer was adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous in the 1940s in the form more familiar today. But, more than “serenity” or “courage” in either form of the prayer, what matters most to me is the word “accept”.

The term “Post-Covid” has become common. But there will be no such thing. We’ll have to live with Covid-19 for a long time, along with continued restrictions. Even when there’s a vaccine, Covid-19 will still be with us. To lose awareness of that will place us in danger again. So a big part of our future will be accepting what’s around us, and not seeing this as a short blip in our history from which we’ll move on. There will be some things we simply have to accept, including many changes in our lives.

In bereavement, people say: “You’ll get over it”, “Time’s a great healer”, “You’ll get there”, all of which imply you can put the loss behind you and start again. Not so. Bereavement is permanent, not a temporary barrier to be climbed over, or illness to be cured, or goal to be achieved. There is no more chance of “post-bereavement” than there is of “post-Covid”. It’s about accepting what’s happened and building life around it, because loss won’t go away. To “accept” isn’t to give in. It’s about finding meaning in different circumstances, accepting what cannot be helped or changed, and the serenity to go on believing that life is still for the living.

A prayer for today

*Help me with acceptance, Lord; give me patience; give me insight;
give me wisdom; give me courage; give me serenity. Amen*

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