

6th October 2020

Descending

**“We have done with Hope and Honour, we are lost to Love and Truth,
We are dropping down the ladder rung by rung ...”**

Rudyard Kipling, Gentlemen-Rankers

A few weeks ago, I was steeped in *Le Tour de France*, a three-week, gruelling cycle race through France and surrounding countries, ending on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. Usually held in July, it had been postponed to September this year, and that meant that some of the stages were held in weather conditions that were different from usual.

There are three kinds of stages in *Le Tour*: flat ones which favour the sprinters, ones with mountain-top finishes for the climbing specialists and ones which combine both. Flat stages need speed. Mountain stages need strength. But the parts which scare the life out of me are the *descents*. If you go up, you have to come down ... and you often have to come down a *long* way ... and you have to come down a long way very, *very* fast. It's terrifying the speeds the riders go on hairpins bends, down narrow mountain roads and often in treacherous conditions. There were several crashes as riders skidded and fell off, and one cyclist missed a corner, hit a barrier and toppled head-over-heels down the banking. Descending is risky! It's difficult enough on the sprints. It's hard enough going *up*. But, boy, do I admire the cyclists who're skilled at descending!

Sometimes in life you'll be forced to descend, and it can be scary – when failure makes you doubt yourself; when your mental health is compromised; in the aftermath of a tragedy; in circumstances that force you to make changes; when, with Rudyard Kipling, hope and honour, love and truth seem to be left behind. The descent may be unavoidable, last for a while and have hidden dangers.

If you're fast enough to be ready for another sprint, you have to be in good enough shape to get there. If you were strong enough to make the climb, you'll be good enough to come down. But be careful on the descent. For you have a lot of *Le Tour* still to complete.

A prayer for today

Lord, thank you for being with me when I was going up. But now I'm going down, I need you more than ever. Keep me safe. Keep me stable. Keep me going. Amen.

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