

“And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.”

2 Corinthians 1:7 (NIV)

One of my all-time favourite books is Douglas Adams' "The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy". Even on the front cover, you get the sense that this is no ordinary book: the subtitle is "A trilogy in five parts". The story has been told in print, audio and film versions, and with varying sections. Parts have been added over the years as the idea developed from radio comedy, into books, television series, stage plays, comics, computer game and a feature film. In the introduction to the anthology, even the author admits that he is not sure what constitutes the complete story, as it seems to vary every time it is produced. The various tales are complete in themselves, but they take on a much wider meaning as the grand story is pieced together.

Our Christian year is also a story in several parts, some of which perhaps feature more prominently than others. If you held a consumer survey about the Christian year, I expect that most people would identify Christmas and Easter as being important festivals. Many might also include "Whitsun", probably because of the holiday, rather than it being the festival of Pentecost. So we have the trilogy. But of course it is a trilogy in (at least) five parts.

Christmas is actually quite a short season; we need to include Advent and Epiphany to truly understand the message of the promised Saviour coming to earth, and making his impact on the whole world. Similarly, Easter is the grand conclusion to the life and work of Jesus; we cannot ignore the pain and suffering that was part of this, and the discipline and obedience to God's will is something we consider during Lent, as a pre-cursor to Easter. And Easter continues after the Sunday event, with the fifty days of teaching and resurrection appearances, until we come to Pentecost. Although marked as just one day (or perhaps a weekend holiday) in our calendar, Pentecost is a very important season. It marks the transition into what is called, rather blandly, 'Ordinary Time' I'd rather it were entitled "Extraordinary Time". After the fulfilment of God's promise at Christmas, the demonstration of God's love at Easter, and the commissioning and empowering of the God's servants at Pentecost – the church is launched into the world, carrying an extraordinary message of faith, hope and love.

This month we are moving from Christmas to Easter; from waiting in faith to experiencing the depth of God's love for us, and the hope that produces. As we travel through Lent towards Easter, may we once again be filled with hope, whatever our own circumstances and the state of the world might seem to say to us. And so may we be empowered and equipped to take God's love out into a needy world.

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