

Growing meditation

‘Haven’t you grown?’ is a question that ceases to be put to us once we are past our teenage years – probably we are grateful for that. If people were particularly tactless, they may be more inclined to say ‘Haven’t you shrunk?’ as we get older!

Yet growth is integral to living. We do not cease to grow because we cease to get taller, or wider. Our growth takes place in other ways. Our body cells are continually being replaced. Evolutionary theory tells us that the whole of creation – the whole of the universe – is in a constant state of change and growth.

The image of the tender shoot emerging from a seed carefully planted and watered can represent so much more than simply the young whom we nurture whilst we watch them grow physically. It speaks of more than just getting bigger; but of a transformation that brings wonder and delight. How does this image apply across the whole of our lifespan even into old age?

Each of the themes in this series of meditations represents an area of life in which we are given the opportunity to grow as we get older and as we move towards death – loving, letting go, seeing, belonging, hoping. Each of these represent gifts that are planted within us. They can be held by us tenderly and allowed to grow and blossom.

This changing and growing takes place until our dying days. William Vanstone, in his book *The Stature of Waiting* tells the extraordinary story of going to visit an elderly bishop whose life was drawing to an end. When Vanstone visits him, the bishop is confined to bed, almost blind and scarcely able to move.

‘His very posture suggested his total exposure to whatever might be done to him, his total dependence and helplessness. As one stood beside him on a particular morning some weeks before his death, one had a sudden and overwhelming impression that something of extraordinary significance was going on before one’s eyes – something that even surpassed in its significance all that the bishop had done in his years of activity and achievement. ...

...He was now simply an object exposed to the world around him, receiving whatever the world might do to him; yet in his passion he seemed by no means diminished in human dignity, but rather, if that were possible, enlarged. (emphasis mine).

Growth continues to take place in us even to the very end. The truth of the gospel is that it is in, through, and beyond death that we grow and become the people that we were ultimately created to be.