

November Season

Reconciling Mission through Prayer and Reflection

3: Becoming a Phoenix



Photo and painting: Darren Cox

Reflection

In legend, the Phoenix was a bird which lived, grew old, burst into flame when it died and then was reborn from the ashes of its burned body. In the *Harry Potter* stories of J K Rowling, Professor Dumbledore is strongly identified with his pet phoenix, Fawkes, and Dumbledore himself dies, is buried amidst flames and is encountered again, alive, beyond the grave. In Christian tradition, the phoenix also became a symbol for Christ, dying and rising. Dumbledore sacrifices himself to save others from evil and Fawkes the phoenix heals mortal wounds through his tears.

In Christian tradition, the phoenix has been a powerful symbol of healing, reconciliation and the victory of life over death. But what does that mean for us? Is it possible to experience the liberation of becoming a phoenix or enabling others to do so?

What we may call the 'phoenix experience' is often a significant part of a person's spiritual journey. Christians may experience a sense of being raised up at the moment of their conversion, baptism and/or confirmation as new faith creates a transformed life and freedom from an old way of living. For others, the phoenix experience may come after recovery from illness, perhaps when years of suffering and increasing disability are transformed by donated organs, replaced joints, or new medication or medical techniques. The phoenix experience can come out of a new relationship after heartbreak, or a new job or the birth of a baby. Even a much needed holiday or a few days' retreat can lead to the sense of renewal that is not just mental and physical, but spiritual as well.

Food for thought or for group discussion

What sort of phoenix experiences have you had which offered transformation, renewal and new hope? Where might you look for such an experience?

However, many people in our society today feel that their lives are burning up and turning to ash: those who are struggling to find employment; those who are trying to make ends meet on very little money; those who are coping with cuts to their benefit or trying to exist on a small pension. For many people too, the dreams and ambitions of a bright future have been dashed: getting a degree may not help you get the job you wanted; or the expectations that your children would have a better or easier life than you have disappeared. What does it take to become a phoenix? In the wider world too, so many people who expected to live out their lives in their communities, practising their faith, going to school, raising families, have found themselves facing displacement, becoming refugees, watching their villages and places of worship broken into ruins by war and weapons.

Yet if we believe in the power and love of Jesus Christ, we believe that it is possible to rise from the ashes and indeed that we must help others to do so. Becoming a phoenix is based on hope and help, a spiritual promise and practical aid.

Food for thought or group discussion:

Who are the people in your community who help others rise from the ashes? What could you or your church do to help them?

Exploring Scripture

Luke 10. 30-37

30 In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and

took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."

36 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

37 The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Food for thought or for group discussion

What does being a good neighbour mean to you?

Prayer

Lord, Jesus Christ,

You have been crucified and have risen;
You have overcome suffering and death.

We pray for all those who lives are in cinders,
Whether through age, illness, injustice or poverty.

Help us to reach into the place of ashes,
And find the new life nestling within.

Help us rekindle the hope of the fallen,
and bring warmth and healing through your saving love.

Amen.

If you are going on to the next resource you might want to start thinking about this: what part does reconciliation play in the phoenix experience?