

Vows and Promises

We are not very good today, at either making a vow, or we take it lightly. There is often a 'let out' clause in the mind of the one who makes the promise. We see the consequences all around us.

Just after Easter we had a Renewal of Marriage Vows in our little chapel. We knew both the husband and wife. We had seen their marriage fall apart, when through illness and uncertainty, the stresses became too much. Divorce proceedings were set in motion. Most of us thought, nothing is going to save this relationship. There was one daughter, a music student, at university. Much of this had begun when she was still at home. She was a Christian, hoping and praying her parents would come together again. One partner, helped by a caring church, was restored to health and also to faith. The other partner, who was, by this time, living over a hundred miles away, had lost faith in God, almost completely.

Then, husband and wife began to see each other, occasionally. We were concerned that there was going to be more hurt. Well over a year passed. They had some holidays together and we were able to catch up with them both, as they were camping in Northumberland, when we were also in that area. The one who had lost faith had been working on a course that most of us would have found very dry and dusty, but through it, the light of God began to shine once more. One major obstacle was immediately overcome. It was a slow road to reconciliation. One day, the news came - they were coming together again, and could they renew their vows in our chapel, with us?

The day arrived. We blew the dust off the lectern and brought it into the chapel, as we felt the service needed to have a touch of solemnity. The Easter flowers were still in place, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, but also celebrating the resurrection of a marriage that had died. We arranged to have a rehearsal in the morning, before the service in the afternoon. We started late, and thanked the Lord that we had taken the precaution of a rehearsal. Their daughter, an accomplished musician, was playing the keyboard. A traditional hymn was played, as they play it in the Kirk, slowly. We slowed our pace. Then we came to a lively song written by Matt Redman. The young keyboard player, unfamiliar with our keyboard or amplification, let rip, the system burst into life and the noise was deafening, so much so that one of the Sisters, sitting underneath a loudspeaker, had vertigo and could not stand up, for at least five minutes! As she was the one who was to speak in the afternoon, it was rather important she could stand on her feet! That was sorted out. It is not so easy to touch each other's ring and speak, holding a service sheet, we discovered. That was practised. There was much laughter.

The afternoon came and the chapel filled with relatives, some of whom had travelled a long way. The couple's daughter, dressed attractively in a borrowed dress and clutching a little posy of flowers, prepared to move between the keyboard and a seat by her parents. You could feel her joy at their reconciliation. She prayed for them, with two of us, when we laid hands on them. The vows were said again meaningfully, before God, and everyone there. It was a beautiful service. Photographs were taken and then we had a delicious buffet meal, followed by a relaxed evening in the lounge. The next day, we accompanied them to their

car; the daughter slid into the back seat, just as she had as a child. She was still beaming with happiness. Her parents sat in front, older, wiser, reconciled to each other and their God and happy, too.

It is not only in the marriage service that vows are said. They are recorded in the earliest parts of the Old Testament. Each New Year, we solemnly renew our vows to serve our covenant God. We make promises to the Lord, and each other, at our commitment

services. Our community is stronger because of it.

The Lord does not mean us to live without the support of vows and promises. They are like a firm bridge over the fast flowing, sometimes tumultuous, river of life. If we fail, or someone else fails us, and the bridge collapses, the waters are liable to be cold and stormy but even there, the Lord can rescue us. If we take vows lightly, we will always be in danger.



A First Commitment to the Sisters of Jesus Way