

Reflection on Sunday 18 October 2026 at St Mary's and on Zoom by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

Growing Old Gracefully

Based on Psalm 71: 9-18

The past couple of weeks have been an interesting time for me.

Firstly, I buried my parents' ashes; I then celebrated a significant personal birthday and, finally, a few days ago, our latest grandchild was born. Everything recently has been about life past, present and future.

My mum died last year and my father a couple of years before that. But we decided that the time had come to remove their ashes from the spare bedroom before our regular house guests began to realise who or what they were sleeping alongside.

I then celebrated being 70 and that, together with my parents being laid to rest and the birth of grandchild No 3, led me to start thinking about the cycle of life and particularly old age.

Someone once said: *Age is simply a number*. And I've often written in birthday cards that age is not about how old you are, it's about how old you feel. That may be true, although I do realise that sometimes age is a number that makes getting out of a comfy chair more challenging than it used to be... I don't deny that.

Reflecting on my parents' lives and admitting my own age, I am coming to the conclusion that growing old can be one of life's great adventures. It comes with challenges, there's no doubt; it comes with the mystery of walking into a room and forgetting why you went there, it comes with discovering that you put the tea pot in the fridge. But, treated with respect, old age can bring a great deal of pleasure.

The Bible offers us a wonderfully encouraging picture of growing older.

Several characters and personalities in the Bible lived to a great age – according to the Bible, Adam lived for 930 years and Noah lived for 950 years. But it's alright because, in Psalm 92 we read that the righteous *will still bear fruit in old age*. What a lovely thought. We may not be quite as energetic as we once were, but that doesn't mean we have stopped growing, learning, loving or contributing.

Indeed, some of life's finest fruits take years to ripen: patience, kindness, wisdom, understanding and the ability to know when to speak and when simply to smile.

Society tends to celebrate youth. Advertisements promise to remove wrinkles, restore energy and make us look twenty years younger. Yet the Bible takes a rather different view. It reminds us that every stage of life has its own beauty and purpose.

Of course, growing older isn't always easy. There may be aches and pains, disappointments, loneliness, or the sadness of losing

people we love. We needn't pretend otherwise. Growing old gracefully doesn't mean smiling through every difficulty or never having a grumble. Sometimes a good grumble can be quite therapeutic!

What matters is remembering that we don't face life's changes and challenges alone. Today's reading from Psalm 71 starts with a plea to God to 'not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.'

There is something deeply comforting about this because God is not going to cast us off; his love doesn't come with a use-by date. We don't become less precious to him because we walk a little slower or need to write things down on a to-do list that gets forever slower. He loves us to the very end.

What's more, in growing older, perhaps God gives us something particularly valuable: perspective.

Things that once seemed terribly important may matter less when we are old. We may become more appreciative of simple pleasures: a beautiful morning, a visit from a friend, laughter around the table or an amusing birthday present.

For my birthday, my sister gave me a chemist's paper prescription bag. Inside was a packet of pills that reminds me what we shouldn't become. [Hold up]. Here it is: a packet of 28 coated tablets called 'OldFartamol' (excuse my language at this point). It says on the packet that these pills 'combat the effects of aging miserably... they provide effective relief from grumpy

bones; constant moaning, forgetfulness and repetitive storytelling’.

Possible side effects include ‘laughter and unexpected smiling’. The dosage, under normal circumstances is one pill a day but, in cases of emergency (like yours) consume all at once.

Inside the box is a small bag of jellybeans.

This reminds me that growing old gracefully shouldn’t be about resisting the years. It's about welcoming each new day with gratitude, keeping our hearts open, our faith quietly growing but, most important, keeping our sense of humour alive.

Six months before my Mum died – she was 96 – I went to visit her at the care home where she was living. I suggested that we go out for a cup of tea, but she said ‘NO... I can’t; I’m waiting for a visit from the King.’ I asked what the King wanted and she said: ‘Probably a hug... it must get very lonely when you’re the King’. At first, I thought she had finally lost her marbles but then I realised that she was just pulling my leg with a twinkle in her eye, in the way that she had for 70 years.

As we get older, we may not be able to do everything we once did, but we can still brighten another person's life with humour; encourage people, offer a prayer or share a kindness.

And surely that is a better and more wonderful way to grow older.

After all, one of the aims of growing old isn't simply to add years to our life, but to add life to our years.

I'll close with a short prayer that applies to everyone, of any age.

Loving God, thank you for the gift of life and for all the years that are shaping us. Help us to welcome each new day, to face our difficulties with courage and to keep our sense of humour when things don't quite go to plan. May we continue to grow in kindness, wisdom and love, and always know that we are held in your care. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

