



One of the ways in which I try and keep vaguely sane is by going running. I go round and round the garden, and if you go around the track often enough you get to know every hole in every tree – mostly because you’ve either, in the dark of the morning, run into them or fallen over them.

The dog goes around with me, and as you go round and round you quite often lose count. I have a number of laps I do – I won’t tell you how many because it’s embarrassing – and I find myself thinking, “Is this the third time, or the second time, or the fourth time round...?”

Events are the things that break in – like running into a tree – and remind you to look where you’re going and to see what’s going on around you.

Much of what we do year by year, even in politics, is something that goes round and round in a fairly predictable pattern... the May elections, the recess in the summer, the conference season in the autumn... and here you go around again.

There must be moments when all of you think, “Am I on this year, or last year, or next year...?” Then we have years like this year, where events come crashing through, and bring us all up short. Events of immense and profound tragedy – when we were praying earlier for those for whom this Christmas will be a hard time, because of bereavement, Jo Cox’s name came to mind and her family.

But events of the referendum, the elections in the United States, the Italian referendum yesterday... it seems to have been a year of extraordinary events, more so than perhaps for a while.

In your roles, sometimes the endless circle of the cycle of the years turns into an endless sense of things coming at you, faster than you can deal with them. Faster than you can work out what they mean, what you should do about them, how you vote, how you think, how you encourage and because you are all leaders – how you lead. You’re challenged constantly by what responsible leadership looks like, whether it’s in parliament with those who are members in one form or another, or it’s working as members of parliament in either House.

But this sense of the cycle that goes round and round is false.

As Christians, we believe in a direction, a journey. A journey that we heard in the readings this evening. A journey that began with God and ends with God, and in which God accompanies us the whole way along the journey. In which there is both a sense of being looked after, but also of being held accountable and responsible.

As we go, Christ draws near us and says, “Come with me. Walk this journey in my way.” It’s not an endless cycle of going around: it’s a direction. It will end. It will come to a finish.

In a few moments we will sing, ‘Lo He Comes With Clouds Descending’ – that great hymn that recalls to us our sense of confidence that God will bring all things to an end, as in one way or another he brought all things to a beginning.

I find constantly in this role that I get either slightly blasé and think, “Oh well, God’s in charge so I’ll just keep pottering along,” or alternatively I take

on far more responsibility than I should, and I somehow think that it all depends on me.

But what we've heard constantly in the refrain at the end of the readings evening, and it applies in your important positions, is that Jesus is with us. That gives us both the opportunity to draw near to him, to recognise that he is the ultimate decider of events, of the future – that nothing is so disastrous that he cannot redeem it, and nothing is so final that he cannot bring new life after it. But also to know that he is the one that, day by day, we can turn to in our weakness and our failure, confess and find renewed strength, hope and determination to keep going.

To forget that is to lapse into that false idea of the cycle, and not to remember that we have begun, we continue – each one of us here has a vocation – and that we will end before him, embraced by his love, but held accountable by his justice and his mercy.

We bring those things together in the presence of Christ: admitting our weakness, trusting in his strength, but also knowing our own call to serve, in love, with everything we have.

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