

We once lived in a vicarage close to the busy A272 and consequently we received lots of visitors from " gentlemen of the road" who were passing by. When I enquired as to how the church had responded in the past, I was told that a previous Vicar would always give each caller £5 before sending them on their way.

I found myself recalling how Peter and John were accosted by a crippled man at the temple gate in Jerusalem. (see Acts 3) He expected money from them, but they gave him something more, new strength in his feet and ankles. Raising that man up to a personal resurrection.

We are reminded in our Gospel reading (John 15) today that our lives must always abide in the strength and love of Jesus. That we are each a branch of the one true vine and we must draw inspiration for our words and actions from consciously remaining close to Him. That's one of the reasons daily prayer is vital so that we take time to make sure we are abiding in him for the tasks and challenges of the day ahead.

When we neglect this, one of the pitfalls we then face is to see our response to any situation in terms of quantity and material value.

There is no doubt that financial aid is a vital component of the help we need to give in a whole range of troubling situations in our world today, and also to secure the long term future of churches like ours.

But there is something about our abiding in Jesus that demands that we don't resort to a formulaic response to needs that present themselves.

The well-known hymn " Abide with me" tends to be restricted to sombre occasions these days, but actually its sentiments need to be part of our regular prayer that we may know his abiding presence through all the change and chances of life.

"When other helpers fail and comforts flee.
Help of the helpless, Lord, abide with me".

Those who called at our door expecting their regular fiver were largely disgruntled by my reticence to hand over the cash. They saw this as what the church should be doing without question! To talk about their life history and to see what really might be done to help, was not what they expected or wanted and it led to some heated exchanges.

But there is something about allowing our lives to be entwined with the Jesus who is our vine through which we can grow as a fruitful branch that demands more from us in our dealings with others than the expected response.

Every blessing
Andrew