The Seasons of Summer"

"He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul."
Psalm 23:2–3

What a remarkable summer this has been!

For weeks we have lived with glorious sunshine, cloudless skies and temperatures that have made even the simplest jobs feel like hard work. Gardens have cried out for rain, lawns have turned from green to brown, and many of us have discovered that hot nights can be far more tiring than hot days. I suspect more than a few of us have found ourselves wandering around the house in the early hours because sleep simply wouldn't come.

The seasons have a way of shaping our lives. We complain about the rain through much of the year, yet after weeks without it we find ourselves looking hopefully at every dark cloud on the horizon. It reminds us that many of God's gifts are only fully appreciated when we have to wait for them.

For me, this has been a summer very different from the one I had expected.

Many of you have asked where I have disappeared to, and why you haven't seen so much of me around our churches. Shortly after Easter I became seriously ill with reactive arthritis, followed unexpectedly by Bell's Palsy. Between the two, there were hospital visits, an alarming collection of tablets and several weeks when the pain made even sleeping difficult. The painkillers also meant I was unable to drive safely, which made visiting people and getting around the Circuit almost impossible.

The good news is that I am definitely on the mend. Recovery, however, is taking longer than I had hoped. Although the pain has reduced enormously, I still have quite a long way to go before my strength and stamina return fully. If you see me moving a little more slowly than usual, that is simply part of the journey back.

One of the greatest encouragements during these months has been the kindness of so many people. Thank you for your prayers, your cards, your emails, your telephone calls and your patience. Thank you to everyone who has quietly stepped in to lead worship, visit, organise, arrange rotas, make tea, unlock doors, prepare flowers and do the countless jobs that keep our churches alive week by week.

One of the privileges of being your minister is seeing just how much happens

behind the scenes. The Church has never been about one person. It is about God's people serving together, each bringing the gifts that He has given them. This summer has reminded me of that truth in a very practical way, and I am deeply grateful to every one of you.

Many of you have also been asking another question:

"How is Whimbrel?"



I know she has almost become part of our church family!

There were times this spring when I honestly wondered whether she would get into the water at all. My illness meant that many of the jobs that normally happen before launching simply had to wait, and for a while it looked as though this year's sailing season might pass me by altogether.

Thankfully, that wasn't the end of the story.

Whimbrel was launched successfully and is sailing beautifully once again. Better still, I have now been able to sail in her myself. I have to admit that a traditional sailing boat is an excellent fitness instructor! Pulling on halyards, hauling sheets and moving around the boat quickly reminded me that I still have plenty of strength to rebuild.

Yet as we sailed across the water with the sails drawing perfectly and the boat settling into her familiar stride, I found myself simply smiling. It wasn't because everything was back to normal—it isn't—but because it felt like another small step forward. Recovery is rarely dramatic. More often it is made up of little milestones that quietly remind us that we are moving in the right direction.



Another highlight of the summer has been the arrival of my first great-grandson, Toby. New life has a wonderful way of lifting our eyes beyond today's difficulties and reminding us that God is always creating new beginnings. Like many great-grandparents, I suspect I shall be mentioning him from time to time!

As I have reflected on these past months, I have realised that our lives have seasons just as nature does. There are seasons of energy and activity, when everything seems to flourish. There are also seasons when life slows us down, whether through illness, bereavement, anxiety or circumstances beyond our

control. None of us would choose those seasons, yet they often teach us lessons that the easier times never could.

One lesson I have been learning is that accepting help can be every bit as important as giving it. Ministers are usually far happier visiting than being visited, praying than being prayed for, helping than being helped. This summer many of you have quietly reversed those roles, and I have been reminded that allowing others to care for us is also part of Christian fellowship.

As we move towards the autumn, my hope is that we will all find ourselves refreshed—not simply by cooler weather when it finally arrives, but by God's presence among us. We have much to look forward to together as our churches continue to worship, serve our communities and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Whatever this summer has brought for you—whether it has been a time of happiness, worry, loss, celebration or simply trying to keep cool in the heat—I pray that you will know the promise of the Psalmist:

"He refreshes my soul."

May God bless you and those you love throughout the remainder of the summer, and I look forward to seeing many more of you over the weeks ahead.

Every blessing,

Revd Phillip (Phyl) Fanning