



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

Philippians 2:12-15 'No Murmuring and Arguing'

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without murmuring and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

I've often noticed around Hampden Park – especially at dusk – swirls and swarms of birds in the sky, moving at great speed, and very close together. So close together, in fact, it's amazing that they all seem to be moving as one, not as many. How they are so attuned to one another, seemingly instantly, is astonishing – a minor miracle – and I'd really need a member of the RSPB to tell me how they manage this without crashing into each other! Recently, also at dusk, this swarming – 'murmuration' I believe it's called – was evident at the seafront. As you can see from this (slightly ropery) picture I snapped, the birds were in a single cohesive mass, darting up and around, underneath and spiralling in the sky. I haven't been able to find out why it's called a 'murmuration'. (Apparently, it's from the Latin '*murmuratio*' which means 'grumble').



Interesting that Paul uses this expression in his letter from prison to the church at Philippi. It seems to recall the Israelites grumbling in the desert, having fled Egypt but fed up at the hardships they were experiencing, leaving Moses to bear the brunt of their discontent. In Lamentations this phrase also appears: "You have heard their taunts, O Lord, all their plots against me. The whispers and murmurs of my assailants are against me all day long" (Lamentations 3:61-62). Someone else having a hard time that day.

Perhaps 'murmurations' are so called because of the way grumbles and gripes can be catching, like a song sung by many? If you hear someone else moan and complain, is it easier to resist and offer words of comfort and hope, or to join in and have a good grumble too? It's certainly hard to go against the flow sometimes, and to be the odd one out. However, maybe in these dark times we're in, we need to break with the crowd and be ready to speak, or demonstrate, the love of God in whom we live? Paul suggests that his friends in Philippi put aside negativity and disagreement, and instead encourages them to "shine like stars in the world". Maybe this Lent we can murmur a little less, and shine a little more, in our witness to those around us.

Prayer:

How easy it is, Lord, to grumble and complain and moan!

How easy it is, Lord, to see only my own needs, my own desires, my own self!

Grant me a moment to step back, a moment to breathe, and a moment to listen to you,
that I may remember the needs of others, that I may find words of thanksgiving to say,
and to take the opportunity to shine like a star in the darkest places.

All this is only possible, by the power of your life-giving Spirit. Amen.

