

Thought from the Rectory July 2020

In one of our online services recently, we sang the well-known hymn Amazing Grace, written by John Newton. Newton turned his life around from being the captain of a slave ship in the middle of the 18th century to being part of the slave trade abolition movement later in his life. He was converted to Christianity following an experience on board ship and later ordained as an Anglican priest. He subsequently worked with William Wilberforce to bring about the abolition of the slave trade. In February 1807, when the act to abolish the slave trade finally became law, John Newton, nearly blind and near death, "rejoiced to hear the wonderful news."

One of the verses of Amazing Grace says:

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

In recent weeks, we have heard the word "SHIELD" a lot. The most vulnerable members of society have been advised to shield, to protect themselves from the danger of Covid-19. Although staying at home for such a long time must be very difficult, the risk of catching the virus with the probable consequences gives the vulnerable little choice. I looked up the meaning of the word "shield":

To Shield (verb) - Protect from a danger, risk, or unpleasant experience.

A Shield (noun) - A broad piece of metal or another suitable material, held by straps or a handle attached on one side, used as a protection against blows or missiles.

The vulnerable are shielding to protect themselves from Coronavirus but John Newton used the word as a noun, describing God as his shield. In the Bible, the book of Psalms uses the word shield frequently to describe the protection God can provide to those who believe in him, words which would have been familiar to John Newton:

In Psalm 28 verse 7 we read:

The LORD is my strength and shield.
I trust him with all my heart.

In the sixth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament, St Paul advises Christians to put on the armour of God, including to "hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil".

Being a Christian does not mean that awful things won't happen to us, but we believe that when the difficulties of life do hit us, God will protect us and help us cope. This can be hard, but the shield of faith does help me. So whether you are shielding or not, I encourage to remember the words of John Newton, the Psalmist and St Paul and trust in God, our strength and our shield.

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