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Many years ago, on a cold, miserable Saturday afternoon in Winter, having run out of ways of entertaining two small boys, we decided to have a film afternoon. ET was on the tv and so with popcorn in hand we sat down as a family to watch. The boys were enchanted by the tale of Elliot & his alien friend until, of course, ET became ill. Joel was about 6 years old at the time and as he watched ET die, tears rolled down his cheeks and he begged us to turn off the tv as he couldn't bear the sadness. As a parent all I wanted to do was to stop his pain, to take away his grief, but I also knew how the story ended. So, Andrew and I, each holding a tearful child mourning the loss of their fictional friend, waited for the hopeful ending when ET was restored to life and able eventually to go home.

We are at that time of the year again when we watch the unfolding horror of Christ's passion; his suffering, both physical & psychological; his public execution; and there is a part of us that longs to look away, to 'turn off' the awfulness and to move on quickly to Easter Sunday. Even though we know the end of the story, we do not want to linger in the darkness.

And yet part of our faith is to live in that place of struggle; we recognise in Good Friday the pain of the human condition; the hurt, loss and grief that we have experienced or we have seen in others. All we desire is to make it better and yet we know through the story of our faith that you cannot rush hope; Good Friday and Holy Saturday must be lived through before Sunday arrives. But the assurance is that it will arrive; that light will enter dark places and new possibilities will come to barren experience. This is our faith.

I am always interested to reflect on how difficult we, the church, finds the concept of death. I do not mean the personal loss of a loved one but the idea of some aspect of our church life changing or even ceasing. Despite our central story being one of death and resurrection, we seem to view change in the life of the church, not as a part of a natural cycle in which we look forward to something new, but as a failure or a personal affront.

The Methodist Church is asking every church in the country two very simple questions: 'How can we be more fruitful in our worship and witness?' and 'What needs to 'die' for our fruitfulness to grow?'

Over the course of this next year it is a question we will be asking at AMC and all the circuit churches. They are questions that might cause us some pain and some soul searching but they should not be questions we are afraid to answer, for, if we are truly Easter People, we have faith that in God there are always new possibilities; there is always hope.

Helen