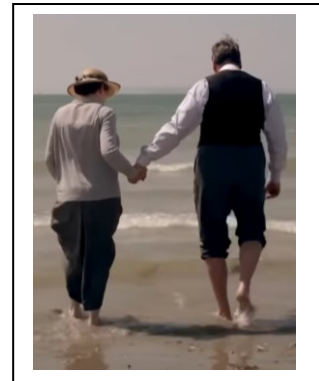


Hold my hand

As a thank you for the extra work involved in putting on a ball, her ladyship, Cora Grantham, asks Carson, butler and true patriarch of the house, to organise a day out for all the staff. I am, of course, referring to an episode of *Downton Abbey*, the much-loved TV drama series. As a treat for the servants, he can't decide whether to go to the new Science Museum in South Kensington or the Crystal Palace on its new site at Sydmouth Hill. Other ideas include Madame Tussauds, and the Natural History Museum. The staff are not very enthusiastic, and so he eventually settles for a day by the sea, which, although he sees as a defeat, Mrs Hughes, head housekeeper, is relieved he has at last realised what the staff would like to do as their fun day out!



So, filming takes place on the coast. Charles Carson is seen, with his trousers legs turned up, tentatively stepping into the sea. Mrs Hughes looks back at him and says, "Come on, I dare you!". Carson replies, "What if I get my trousers wet?", to which came back the quick remark, "if you get them wet we'll dry them!".

The conversation continues, "Suppose I fall over?" again Mrs Hughes quickly replies, "Suppose a bomb goes off, suppose we are hit by a falling star!" she then adds with a little more understanding, "You can hold my hand, and then we'll both go in together". "I think I will hold your hand", hesitantly Carson takes another step, "it'll make me feel a bit steadier". Mrs Hughes reaches out to him and then, holding her hand, he gingerly steps further out into the shallow water of the sea.

"You can always hold my hand if you need to feel steady". Mrs Hughes smiles.

We see them, hand in hand paddling in the sea, with the water gently splashing around their ankles.

This reminded me of times when I've been near water, and then not had the courage to go any further. Twice during a holiday in Spain, several years ago now, with my sister and friends, I had to hold her hand as we jumped into a small lagoon for a dip in the beautiful clear water. Then later in the week, again she held my hand as we went scuba diving. I don't like water, but I would have missed a once in a lifetime opportunity, if I hadn't been adventurous. However, I wouldn't have been brave enough if my sister had not been there to hold her hand out towards me.

What a difference a held-out hand, to us, can make.

Whether it's a hand of friendship and welcome, support and encouragement, or healing and forgiveness. To see a hand there, one we can grasp, can be very reassuring, supporting and encouraging. We know that 'help is at hand' if we need it. It may also mean we can step out into something new and exciting, into the unknown and even something a little risky, but with someone beside us, then it doesn't seem half as scary or uncertain, and could be a great opportunity and fun.

Sometimes we might be like Carson, and want to control everything in our daily lives, keeping life predictable and safe. However, I was recently reading how instead of doing this, when situations in our private world make us feel unsteady and unsure, we should grip the hand of Jesus for support. This means we are living in conscious dependence on Him, which is a good thing. At that time, I was facing difficult circumstances and was a little fearful of how things were going to turn out. These

words spoke to me, so I physically held out my hand and said, "OK Jesus, I'll hold your hand, and we'll face this together!", whereupon I grasped his hand and held on tightly! figuratively speaking.

My young grandson once said to me, when I was nervous about an event where I was speaking, "You've got this grandma!". I now know what he meant, and I can have the confidence to say, "You've got this Jesus!"

In Isaiah Ch 41 v10, it says, "Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I am your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady and keep a firm grip on you" (The Message Bible).

As we begin a new year, what more do we need? Let's reach out and grip the hand of Jesus.

God bless

Eileen

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