

Dear all

It was a real pleasure to return to saying the Daily Office in the church this morning. Sadly, just me and faithful hound! Hopefully, this might be the start of a wider return to church. I will let you know as soon as I hear more.

This week marks Christian Aid Week. It seems so strange how quiet this has been this year, for obvious reasons. I don't know how things happen here in DSJ, but in Belmont we would have coffee mornings and various other fundraising events. We would also take part, with other churches across denominations, in house-to-house collecting. It was quite an eye-opener being involved in this aspect. Some of the responses I had were quite mind-boggling – some aggressive, some very generous. Possibly my favourite was a house the porch of which was festooned with stickers saying 'Angels welcome here' etc. The door was shut in my face. Perhaps I should have worn wings!

Christian Aid Week often polarises opinions. On the one side are those who believe "charity should begin at home". We have enough problems ourselves, without giving money abroad... On the other side are those who feel we are better off than millions round the world, and we should be supporting them out of our (relative) abundance. Needless to say, there are many nuances and variations between.

The Bishop of Grantham, the Rt Revd Dr Nicholas Chamberlain, has posted a video reflecting on the fact that love unites us all in Christian Aid Week:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=245991066715644>

Do go to the Christian Aid Week website at <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week> and, if possible, give a donation to go towards making up for what they are missing this year.

The theme of Love was the subject of the reflection from St Paul's Cathedral this morning.

Be Assured Love will Win

Specially-commissioned reflections by John Swinton on love in the time of Covid-19. (*The Revd Prof John Swinton* is Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care in the University of Aberdeen, specialising in dementia care).

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18

One of the things that has become clear in this time of Covid 19 is that being human means being vulnerable.

With the coming of the virus all of us are confronted with our vulnerability at a physical emotional and a spiritual level. There are pluses to that, but there are also negatives. I remember listening to a conversation early on when the virus was just beginning to emerge as a problem. It went something like this: "Yes I know it is serious, but so is the flu. Unless you have an underlying condition there is nothing to worry about." This struck me as understandable, but quite terrifying. It reminded me of that dodgy line that Bono sang on the song Feed the World: "Well tonight thank God its them instead of you!" I never thought that was a wise sentiment, but to hear it again in a slightly different form worried me.

Feeling vulnerable can be a breeding ground for unhealthy anxiety. Anxiety breeds fear and fear can very easily drive out love. One way of dealing with anxiety is to project it outwards onto others. "I can cope with this situation as long as I can persuade myself it is happening to someone else; someone who is not like me - *they* are old, vulnerable, sick, disabled – *I* should be safe enough." Of course, now we know that no one is "safe enough," but that dangerous dynamic of coping with anxiety by turning away from people still lingers.

I was in Australia when the crisis began to emerge. The big thing there was people hoarding toilet paper. No one knew why, but everyone knew they had to get it and *lots* of it! It was quite funny, but at another level, there is something deeply troubling about hoarding food and drink (and toilet paper) knowing full well that in doing so we put the weaker members of society at risk. It is a deeply troubling way of dealing with anxiety. The biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann notes that the people of Israel developed a similar "scarcity mentality." They always lived in fear that they wouldn't have enough and even when they did have enough, they lived in fear of losing it. Sounds a bit like us? When our vulnerability is exposed, we discover our very own scarcity mentality.

As Christians, we are called to be generous people who recognise the reality of fear and anxiety - Jesus was pretty anxious as he moved towards the cross - but refused to allow fear to drive out love. Social distancing tempts us to develop an attitude that turns us away from people. Love always draws us towards one another. Love in a time of Corona virus recognises our shared vulnerability and refuses to allow anxiety and fear to drive out the power of God's vulnerable love. Be assured, love will win.

Nick Fawcett posted this prayer yesterday. Even with the announcement of the relaxing of lockdown, there is still much fear and uncertainty around.

Lord,
too many are still dying,
too many still grieving,
too many still hurting.
We know that progress has been made,
but so much remains to be done.
Reach out to hold.
Reach out to help.

Too many feel cut adrift,
all at sea;
too many feel frightened,
consumed by anxiety;
too many feel lonely,
abandoned;
too many are confused,
unsure where to turn next.
Reach out to hold.
Reach out to help.

So many are still falling victim to this disease,
fighting for their lives,
dependent on oxygen or ventilators,
on intensive care units and round-the-clock support,
to give them a chance of survival.
Though the death rate may have peaked
and be slowly falling,

the impact of coronavirus
and its potential consequences
remain terrifying.
Reach out to hold.
Reach out to help.

Too many people with other health conditions are at serious risk –
those with cancer,
heart conditions,
possible strokes,
or requiring surgery or other treatment,
putting their wellbeing in jeopardy by not going to hospital,
or having the option taken away from them by cancelled appointments.
Though countless lives are being saved,
we know that countless others may well be lost as an indirect result of this pandemic.
Reach out to hold.
Reach out to help.

Too many people's future is in doubt,
their jobs,
their businesses,
their livelihoods
undermined by the consequences of social distancing.
We think of those whose life savings have been lost through the collapse of a venture,
those who live with the threat of redundancy or dismissal from their jobs,
those who are likely to find themselves with no employment
and no income,
once the current furlough arrangements end.
Reach out to hold.
Reach out to help.

Though governments have done much to mitigate the economic consequences of this crisis,
we realise there is a limit to their resources,
and that there can be no guarantees for the future.
How deep the recession will be,
and how severe an impact it will have on ourselves,
our children
and our children's children,
we do not know,
but we are troubled and anxious about what it all might mean.
Reach out to hold.
Reach out to help.
Amen.

Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark