

No longer other people's news....

I have always enjoyed keeping up with the news. When I was younger, I would walk to the petrol station near my digs on a Sunday afternoon and buy a newspaper, a packet of cheese and onion crisps and a Twix. I would then spend all afternoon buried in the broadsheets until my friends showed up, and then we would be off, out and about. The news was always something I was interested in, as it told stories about other people's lives, how their political systems worked, about their landscapes and cultures and their variety of food and fashion.

As I grew older, I became more aware of the difference in life experiences of people born in different countries: the social impact created by the calibre of their political leaders, the impact of changing weather patterns on food security and how injustice and poverty could lead to anger and civil unrest, unlawful imprisonment and war.

As we have moved into a digital age, the news is now constant and its immediacy is breathtaking. At the touch of a button, I can read about the current situation in almost any part of the globe, and the news is there, even when I am not fully able to understand the implications of what the reporter is sharing, moment by moment. I have come to realise that stories I have read in the past about other countries and cultures, are happening now, here, and someone else's news has become part of my own.

I remember being fascinated by Russian culture, and particularly the patience of the population who would queue up outside shops waiting, only to find that the shop had run out of the one essential item they needed. I remember reading about the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, and the heroic efforts of healthcare workers working tirelessly, trying to contain an invisible foe. And more recently, the people of Wuhan, asked to stay indoors for weeks and weeks on end, in an effort to suppress the spread of Covid-19. These were all news stories, happening to unknown people far away. How is it, that these stories are now ours too?

Our interconnectivity has been a mostly positive experience for us in the UK: we can take our holidays overseas, we can browse the supermarket and purchase delicious overseas foods, we can order products and services, manufactured in faraway lands such as Qatar and Seoul and we can appreciate the culture and expertise provided by talented, dedicated people whose names and faces we do not know.

Now, our interconnectivity is on a different level and for the global good. Across the nations, scientists are sharing their latest understanding of how this new disease behaves, to achieve the common goal of saving lives and alleviating suffering. Doctors are sharing best practice of their patients' recovery and return to health, to ensure every life saved becomes a model of how to save another. Renowned economists are sharing their expertise, so that all governments have the tools needed to create financial support packages for their people. Instead of sharing news, we are sharing knowledge.

During Jesus's life, He often heard news, some good and some less so. As a child, Jesus would have heard all the stories about the life and escapades of the Children of Israel, both their successes and failures, from the Scriptures. In the temple, aged just 12, Jesus heard the preaching of the Teachers of the Law. Whilst attending a wedding at Cana, He was told that the bridegroom had run out of wine! He also heard the news of the death of John the Baptist, His cousin, and was deeply sorrowful. He later also heard about the death of his friend Lazarus and many other things beside. Jesus, like us, was not immune to the distress and consequences which came of hearing the news.

News travels fast, and thankfully across the news channels, stories are emerging of individuals and groups performing acts of courage, kindness, generosity and bravery. These stories help to remind us that we can all find something to do, or say, to pray for, or contribute to help others during this time of change and rebalancing.

During May it was Christian Aid Week, giving us an opportunity to research for ourselves the selfless work being undertaken by committed people, who are just like you and me, to try to improve the lives of others experiencing hardship. When recently set the task of counting our blessings, Amber and I created a list which included: running water, flushing loo, shower, access to food, sitting in our garden, using the internet, going for walks, our pets and talking to our friends.

Whilst we may be feeling cut off and separated from our friends and loved ones - many find social distancing when meeting up with a friend painful and awkward; find the lack of a warm hug hard to replace by Zoom, Skype or telephone calls - we have an abundance of love available to us through Jesus. As we make our prayers for our family and friends, country and world, we have a great High Priest advocating on our behalf, whose warmth and commitment to us is unwavering and without end. We are therefore not alone.

We pray for better news and brighter days, for all the nations of our world.

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