

The New Normal

Spring has finally arrived! The blossom trees are looking beautiful, daffodils are popping up in the park and the birds are in fine voice! This, however, is a spring like none of us have ever experienced before. Hopefully, by now, you'll have all got used to the somewhat surreal conditions we've come to know as the "new normal"; social distancing, rolling news telling us of the suffering and the strain on the NHS, no-one on the streets and no toilet roll or pasta in the shops that we must now queue to get into (at least we British have always been good at queuing!). But even now, like me, you may still have moments when you feel as though you're in a film and that will soon finish and everything will be back to normal.

The lockdown has affected everyone differently. For some, it has been an opportunity to reset, get on top of the housework/gardening or learn a new skill. For others it has been an ongoing battle to keep their job, or work from home, whilst trying to keep children occupied and learning. I confess that my new dual career as an archaeologist and school teacher has not got off to a flying start! For everyone, but especially those who are ill or have lost loved ones, it is a scary and worrying time, and we crave reassurance and good news.

As Christians, the source of our good news is still fresh in our memory as we celebrate the hope contained within the Easter story and look forward to Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - a reminder that this gift is for all of us. Thankfully though, there is plenty of other good news around too, if we look out for it.

As a result of the pandemic, we are seeing the kindness and resilience of the human race when faced with a crisis; thousands who answered the call to volunteer with the NHS, the 99 year-old war veteran who has raised (at time of writing) £18m by walking 100 lengths of his garden, and, in our own community, the Make Lunch volunteers who are delivering meals to families in need. The sudden halt on air travel and manufacturing has allowed the earth some respite too, through the global reduction in pollution levels. Locally, there have been many comments on how nice it is to hear the birds each morning. All of this proof that the Holy Spirit is with all of us, working hard. Perhaps Pentecost has come early this year?

Despite this, isolation is still a challenge. We're not used to spending so much time away from friends or family, and, for some, this in itself is pretty upsetting. It does, however, give us an opportunity to invite God into our homes, to share our isolation with Him. We can use this time to get to know Him better, pick up our Bibles, chat to Him with our morning brew, hear Him in the birdsong. We can spend this time together, away from the distractions we may have had before. We can share our hopes and worries and know that we will be comforted in love, knowing we are never truly alone.

So, whatever the coming weeks and months have in store for us, no matter how crazy, stressful, or surprising, with and without toilet roll, we can be sure that we are not facing it alone and we have vast stocks of hope and good news to draw from at any time (unlike the shops! Sorry, couldn't resist!).

*We cry out to you, O God, in times of trial,
and in You we will find refuge,
in Your hands we find our salvation.*

(From the 2020 URC Prayer handbook, p.57)

Sarah Cattell

