

Lockdown and Freedom



This hen is not very happy. She is sick, so she has been isolated behind wire-netting and is prevented from being out and about with other hens. No longer is she able to forage for insects, dig holes and flick soil through her feathers in a patch of soft dirt. Can she find freedom where she is?

At present many of us are also isolated. We are in lockdown in an effort to slow down and restrict the spreading of coronavirus in our world. Vulnerable elderly people, particularly, are instructed to stay at home and only venture forth for essential purchases, medical reasons or exercise.

As Christians, we can no longer attend church services in person. Many cathedrals and churches are responding to this restriction by livestreaming their services on the internet. It is good to worship with others, although via the internet is not the same as being part of a physical congregation.

We are in a strange time, yet we are still members of the body of Christ, called to embody Christ in a world which is today being changed and is changing us. When we embody Christ this Lent we are reminded of the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert before he began his ministry. In the wilderness Jesus was alone, but not quite. We are told in Mark 1:13 that he was tempted by Satan, and “was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”

We know about being tempted to stress out, and be anxious and afraid because of thoughts that arise in our minds, especially when we are alone and feeling depressed, but what about the wild animals and angels? We share God’s world with all creation. Have we now time to pause, look at a bird flying or listen to its call? We can choose to stop and play with chickens or other pets if we have them, watch insects busy in the garden or notice roses gradually unfolding. By being less bound by time we are free to enjoy God’s living creation, perhaps with angels caring for us.

As we enter Holy Week and Easter, we are confronted by the fear and distress of

Jesus as he approached betrayal and desertion by his friends, his coming capture, crucifixion and finally, death. Was his belief in revealing God's mission of love in the world a horrible mistake?

As we continue living in the current environment we do not know whether we, or people we live among, will catch the coronavirus, how people out of work will manage, or for how long all this will continue. As we listen to the daily reports of more and more people being infected and dying from the coronavirus, it is easy to become depressed and look for someone or something to give us comfort.

When crucified, Jesus was nailed to a stationary cross, unable to move. He was alone, but again, not quite. Passers-by taunted him, but a few women friends and his mother were, "looking on from a distance" (Mark 15:40). They had not deserted him. There was also a close neighbour, nailed to a cross, who in Luke 23:43 unexpectedly offered Jesus an affirmation of his identity and asked for help. Jesus responded with what must have sounded ridiculous in the situation, the assurance of his caring love and presence for ever.

Experiencing interaction with other people "from a distance" by telephone or on-line is becoming common for us. It may be consulting our doctor, participating in meetings, chatting with family members and friends, or contacting neighbours living alone. In lockdown we become neighbours of strangers sharing the same restrictions as we are. They may be the unlikely ones who offer us unexpected help which we can gratefully receive. By serving and being served, we share God's love and healing.

Just before his death Jesus cried out to God, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (Mark 15:34). It was a cry rising from a feeling of utter desolation. We are told that at that time the curtain in the temple separating God from the people was torn apart. This act symbolised God present with Jesus and us, grieving and sharing the pain.

After Jesus' death, his body was given to Joseph of Arimathea who wrapped it in a linen cloth and placed it in a sealed rock tomb (Mark 15:46).

On Easter Day, Jesus' body was seen alive in many places, freed from death and the tomb. The risen Jesus met his grieving friends, showed them his wounds and forgave their desertion and denial. The disciples' experiences of pain, joy and forgiveness set them free to receive the Holy Spirit to guide and empower them in their future life.

Although we do not know when our lockdown will end, we *shall* emerge from this period, and we *will* be changed. We have been wounded, but we have had the freedom to grow in love and thankfulness for God and others—human and non-human. This is a time that is making us more aware of God’s life present in all creation. Can we now move forward in our lives, embodying the risen wounded Christ who showed God’s love and forgiveness to all?



The day *will* come when we can again, like these hens, enjoy the close company of our friends.

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