

Homily

Whilst we've been in lockdown I have been having some lovely chats with people on the phone. Keeping in touch with members of the congregation and, to be honest, also being rather more in touch with my friends than I usually am, it's been a time for catching up. One of the topics in a lot of the conversations has been the WEATHER!

It was so hot at the beginning of lockdown. For those not in isolation or shielding, lovely to take daily exercise in the sunshine. Then just when summertime should be starting it got very windy and wet. The weather seems to be an endless source of fascination for us all, because it's so changeable and because it does affect us. I think it was a blessing that the weather was good at a difficult time because blue skies really help us feel more positive and dull, grey days are oppressive. So for our wellbeing, certainly at first the weather helped a bit.

"For the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout."

Our reading from Isaiah links nicely with the gospel parable of the sower but rather than think about that familiar parable I'd like us to look a bit at the verses before our passage from Isaiah Chapter 55. It is an invitation to abundant life.

The abundant life that God is offering to the Israelites is possible because of the covenant which God has made with his people, a covenant which they found hard to keep and so, at this time the Israelites are in exile, Jerusalem has fallen, David's line is broken – they are experiencing pain and uncertainty: God's love no longer seems steadfast and strong.

Can this fractured relationship be healed?

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Says the prophet Isaiah.

Talking with others I have a feeling that the days to come with the easing of lockdown, when we are "living with Coronavirus", 'the new normal', however we sum it up, are going to be very much harder than the initial lockdown; terrifying and heart-breaking as that time was. Because this pandemic has exposed all our vulnerability and whilst it has brought many people together in a common cause, it has also showed very sharply the inequalities and injustices in our society. It has shown us where we are divided.

Life in lockdown has been very different for those whose housing is cramped or inadequate, for those who cannot work at home and have found themselves suddenly impoverished, than for those with good homes and who have been able to continue to work.

Life in lockdown has shown us who we really rely on – those who care for the sick or housebound, nurses and doctors, those who staff essential shops, who empty our bins, the emergency services and teachers – these are our key workers.

Life in lockdown has revealed that members of black, Asian and minority ethnic groups have been more vulnerable to this virus. Those who are elderly, who have pre-existing medical conditions are more vulnerable. Those who live in poverty with fewer resources to cope with a crisis are more vulnerable.

When we hear God's invitation to abundant life having seen the brokenness in our own society how are we to respond?

We are seekers and prayers of the kingdom, when we hear phrases like 'build back better' 'black lives matter, and 'the time is now' do these words resonate with our kingdom values.

This has been the most dreadful time and perhaps a part of us just wants to get back to normal, to how things were, but I fear that things are different now. We are being forced to stop and think: what does this time present for us as the people of God. Do we want to return to a holy huddle or open up and help to fashion a new future reflecting the values of God's kingdom – where there is an end to injustice and inequality.

The prophetic call is to see things as they truly are but then the challenge is to choose God's costly way of love to make a difference. When things 'go wrong' a human reaction is to doubt the power and goodness of God. Many people at this time will be feeling that their resources are low, perhaps that their mental health is fragile and, with the future is so uncertain, how we can aspire to a better way of being. But God's way brings life, as surely as snow and rain fall, and with God's power there is abundant life and transformation.

'Instead of thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;'

We cannot deny the pain of these last months but must hold fast to the power of God to heal and bring life. So on this sunny morning let us stand together in hope.

Amen