

Isolation and Inspiration

Best to get this bit over with first: I believe that God has spoken to me four times in my life, twice when I was a child and twice in recent years. Four times in seventy-odd years isn't much - a quiet word once a week wouldn't have gone amiss - but still, four is better than none at all.

When Mark asked me to contribute a Thought for the Week, my mind ranged frantically over the ramshackle and disconnected collection of things I enjoy doing - art, tai-chi, writing, church - wondering what possible connections I could find there in the context of today's world of isolation.

As an artist, I am no stranger to isolation. That's how artists spend their time, alone but never lonely, keeping busy while they wait for the Word or the Image or the Music or whatever it may be to visit them. In their isolation, if they are lucky, inspiration comes. But you may have to wait for it, just like waiting for a word from God. You may have to wait an awfully long time. You have to learn to be patient, to let it come to you. You have to learn to Listen. And that's something none of us are used to doing these days.

Up until a few weeks ago, none of us gave much thought to isolation or enforced contemplation. We were Busy. We were dashing headlong through the raucous bedlam of our lives, and loving it. Now, suddenly, we have to stop. We have time for contemplation, time to Listen. I'm not suggesting that, with a few quiet weeks on our hands, any of us is going to be visited by genius of whatever kind. But this is an opportunity to receive, to open our hearts and minds. That doesn't mean doing nothing while you're waiting. As I mentioned above, artists don't usually mope around waiting for inspiration, they get on with stuff while they keep hoping for that gleam of insight. But for once we all have that kind of time. We can become lost in what we're doing, while we Listen. Maybe do something we have been meaning to do but somehow never got round to. It might mean, say, reading a neglected corner of the Bible. It might mean weeding a flowerbed. It might mean clearing out a cupboard. We don't have to anticipate the next thing, to dash on to the next event in our lives. We have the opportunity to live in the present. It's as if we all suddenly find ourselves in monastic orders, living quietly day by day and in contemplation. And who knows, in this isolation we may be visited by inspiration. Or even a word from God.

Some of you will have seen the little series of cartoons which I called "55 A.D.", based very loosely indeed around the person of St Paul, a selection of which I showed at the last Merton Arts Festival. Here's another one. The characters aren't meant to be queueing at Sainsbury's, but they might as well be.

(Geoff Hunt 29 March 2020)

55 A.D.

