

1<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Dear Friends,

I wonder how you are as these weeks progress and am reflecting that we have not gathered for well over a month now. So, today the first thing that I want to say to you is that I miss you, and I look forward to seeing you again properly and in person. That said I also believe that it is right to follow advice and to stay safe, for in that way we are genuinely loving and serving one another and our communities.

Our Gospel reading this week is Jesus the Good Shepherd, from John 10; 1-10, where Jesus speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd and the gateway, the entrance way to life.

*'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.'* Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

*So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'*

Just read that to yourself a couple of times, is there anything new in the passage that really strikes you? How do you relate to the confusion of those who were listening to Jesus as he speaks of himself as the one who enters by the gate and calls his sheep by name and leads them out? He says they recognise his voice, and yet it seems his hearers did not understand!

As I read this I was thinking of the many, many voices that are speaking to us today, daily briefings, confusing figures, all sorts of questions being asked, including the question of where is God in all of this? Or, how do we relate to God and follow Jesus in a time of global pandemic?

I think these are valid questions to ask, and so once again we can turn to Jesus to find the answers, we can look at the way that he lived and loved, the way he challenged injustice. By calling himself the Good Shepherd he also pointed to thieves and bandits, those who stole and exploited the poor and vulnerable. It is worth noting that just as there is a huge gap between the rich and poor today, the same was true of Jesus time, and in speaking of thieves and bandits he was actually talking about the rulers of the day who oppressed the poor. Jesus was pointing out that there were good pastures and a different way of living and being where resources could be more evenly shared. I was so pleased when the people in my street made a collection of food for the food bank recently and amazed at some of the fundraising efforts that are going on, and acts of kindness being carried out. A recent article in the news spoke of a headteacher who is walking 5 miles every day to deliver food to families whose children would normally have free school lunches. All of this reminds me that we are made in the image of a God who is good and capable of much kindness. I am grateful to for your kindness and encouragement for me, and your care towards one another.

So, where is God in all of this? In the acts of love and goodness for sure, but also watching, waiting and suffering with us. Most of us by now will know of someone who has sadly died, and the thought that we cannot mark their passing in the way we normally would is hard. We hear of frontline workers who have selflessly given themselves to care for others and died because their work placed them in a dangerous place. All of that can make us feel impotent, and unable to respond. I suspect most of us have felt like that if only for a moment, but possibly for longer. I think that it is in those moments that we need to pause and listen for the still small voice inside us, the Spirit with us who reminds us that we are known, and we are called by

name, and we are loved. We are reminded to as we move through this Easter Season that new life began only after great suffering and death. We celebrate resurrection because there was death and are reminded that the Christian path is not easy and can at times be confusing and frustrating.

I am going to share a hymn with you, along with a confession, the confession is that this hymn used to annoy me, but over the years, as I have met many circumstances when there was absolutely nothing I could do but trust myself to God and pray, it has become more and more meaningful.

*Father, I place into your hands  
The things I cannot do,  
Father, I place into your hands  
The things that I've been through.  
Father, I place into your hands  
The way that I should go,  
For I know I always can trust you.*

*Father, I place into your hands  
My friends and family.  
Father, I place into your hands  
The things that trouble me.  
Father, I place into your hands  
The person I would be,  
For I know I always can trust you.*

*Father, we love to see your face,  
We love to hear your voice.  
Father, we love to sing your praise  
And in your name rejoice.  
Father, we love to walk with you  
And in your presence rest,  
For we know we always can trust you.*

*Father, I want to be with you  
And do the things you do.  
Father, I want to speak the words  
That you are speaking too.  
Father, I want to love the ones  
That you will draw to you,  
For I know that I am one with you.*

You might want to sing it, or pray it, or simply ponder how wonderful it is that we can trust ourselves, our families and our world into God's hands.

So, as we continue to walk through these days, I pray that you and your families and loved ones will stay safe. I pray that those working on treatments and vaccines will be given success and wisdom. I pray for frontline workers of all kinds. For those who are afraid, and for those who do not have the resources that they need.

I pray too, and look forward to exploring what our world will be like when the lockdown lifts, will we be kinder, will we be more thoughtful with our resources and the ways that we live? Will we have changed? Even, what will church be like, what have we learned. I can only say that to simply go back to what was will be a mistake, and so I pray...

So, what are you praying for, what are you looking forward to, where are you finding hope?

As I have said before, please don't hesitate to be in touch if you would like to talk, or if you have a concern. You remain in my thoughts and prayers.

With love



Reverend Sally Coleman