

23rd October 2020

Dear Friends,

Here we are at the end of October, it feels to me as if the months are rushing by, it is hard to believe that we have lived with the reality of a pandemic for over half a year now, and that it is likely to be ongoing for many more months to come. We have had to find ways of living and relating to one another differently, families have been apart, celebrations have been held differently or postponed and even cancelled as we all adjust to what is frequently called the new normal.

Almost all of us have made huge adjustments to our way of living and working, and we will need to continue to do so, here in Sheffield we have received the news that we are in the VERY HIGH RISK zone for Covid-19, and new restrictions apply to our daily living, the rules for how we can meet and who we can meet have changed, and there are many details to take in. How then do we live in these days?

Way back in March I remember reflecting that in order to love our neighbour we need to take seriously the advice to avoid them, to cross the road to get out of the way, to maintain social distancing, and all of this along with wearing masks, reminders to wash our hands frequently, have become part of our daily lives. Of course, we all deal with this differently, some saying it makes no difference what we do, and others being extremely cautious, I have to admit that I do err on the cautious side, and am aware that this is a frustration to others.

How we live has changed dramatically over the course of a few months, we experienced a bit of respite and freedom over the summer months and now that is being curbed again, so I pause to ask you how you are coping with this, how is it all affecting you and your family and friends, sometimes it helps us to simply name it, to say how we are feeling and coping in these days, we can share this with trusted friends, and of course we can take it to God in prayer, praying for the world, one another and ourselves.

So, how then do we pray? What is your deepest longing at this time, for it is perhaps in that that we find our truest prayer; I want to share with you a prayer written by Walter Bruggeman who dares to speak out the seeming impossible words "end the virus" something we must surely all long for but perhaps cannot begin to imagine:

"We prefer that our worship of you should be upbeat. We like it that church is the happiest place in town.

We take our glimpse of your promised kingdom as a venue where never is heard a discouraging word!

But then reality, like suffering and death, like pandemic and virus, like loss unimaginable!

The reality breaks our happy illusion of a fairy-tale life in the first world, and we are left with stone cold fear and bottomless need.

So we cry out with urgent imperative, HEAR, HELP SAVE!

We cry out with the whole company of people of faith who have cried out.

We cry out, because our cry, since the lips of the slaves back in Egypt is our most elemental word back to you our creator.

We cry out, not in despair, but in confidence that you hear.

You are the one, the only one who can turn sorrow to joy, mourning to dancing, weeping to laughter.

So now God who hears, helps, and saves, hear, act, and make new!

Give us courage and patience, end the virus, let us be rich in soul and poor in things, ordered for neighbourliness, generous with goods, free of fear, but mostly, end the virus!

We pray this in the name of Jesus who defeated the powers of death, overcame the forces of evil, ended the unbearable vexation of leprosy for some, and became Lord of the Dance.

So we pray! So we trust! So we hope in you! AMEN"

(Walter Brueggemann- Virus as a summons to faith)

Those words, "end the virus" must be our hearts cry, and yet I also reflect that they must sit among other cries, cries for the ending of poverty, for peace and justice, for climate change to be taken seriously. This week our Government voted not to provide free meals for children during the school holidays, in a time of rising unemployment and uncertainty surely the decent thing would be to feed children who are in need, we cannot let concerns over the virus blot out our compassion and dull our basic humanity! In this weeks Gospel reading Jesus reminds us to love God, and our neighbour as ourselves. The way that we treat our most vulnerable neighbours surely says a lot about who and how we are.

The Most Important Command

34-36 When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault. One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up: "Teacher, which command in God's Law is the most important?" 37-40 Jesus said, "'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them." (Matthew 22: 34-40 The Message Version)

Love your neighbour, love others as you love yourself, and if you find it hard to love yourself (many of us do), then ask yourself, without giving room for the thought, I don't deserve it, how you would want to be loved, and seek to love others in that way, seek to love the world in that way, perhaps if this virus is a call to anything, it should be a call to a gentler way of living! Maybe the first step towards that is to fix our gaze upon the one who did not grasp at status but came to live humbly among us. I leave you with the words of a hymn:

"Hear The Call of The Kingdom"

Hear the call of the kingdom
Lift your eyes to the King
Let His song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God rich in mercy
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven
The humility of Christ
Walking justly before Him
Loving all that is right
That the life of Christ may shine through us

King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name

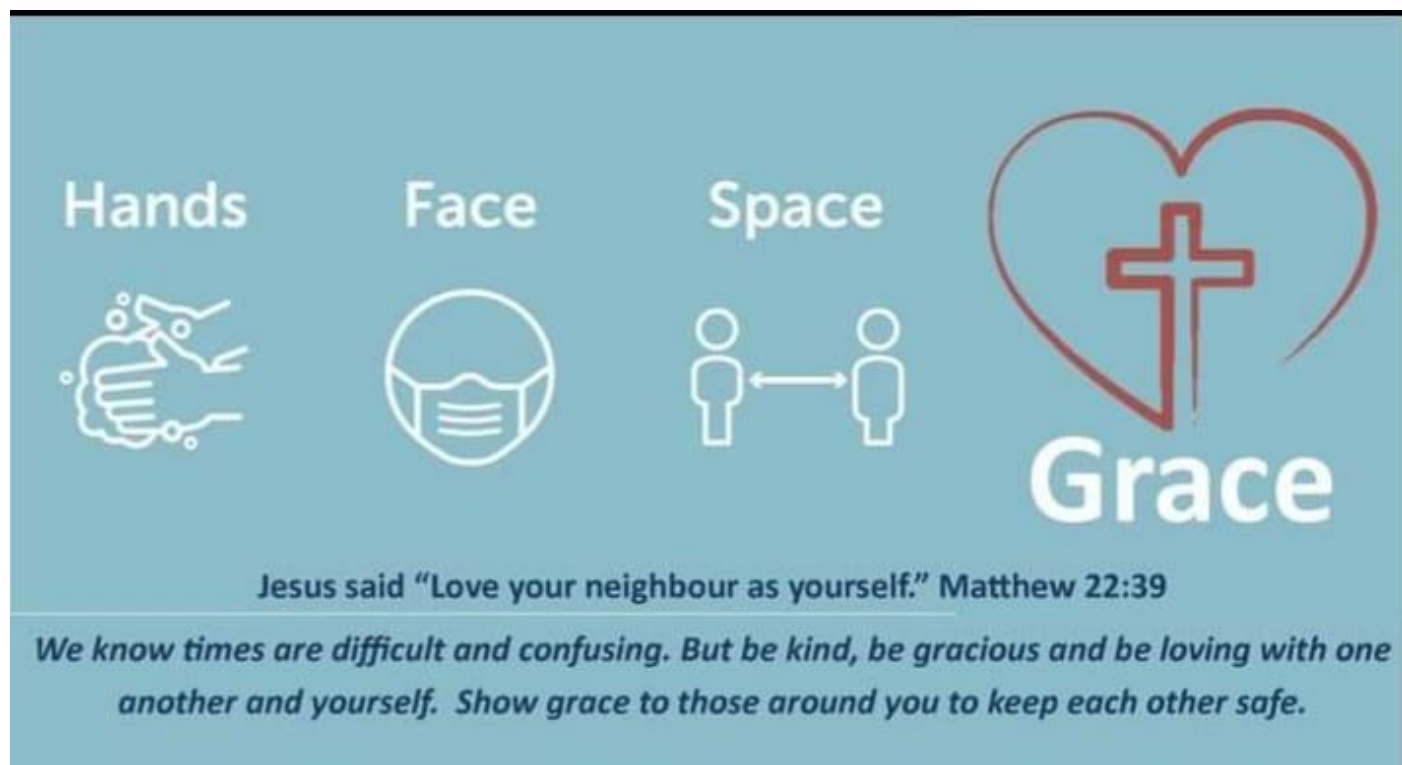
Hear the call of the Kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

(Stuart Townend & Kristyn Getty)

As always, if you would like to talk, please don't hesitate to call me. Keep safe!



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Hands **Face** **Space**

Grace

Jesus said "Love your neighbour as yourself." Matthew 22:39

We know times are difficult and confusing. But be kind, be gracious and be loving with one another and yourself. Show grace to those around you to keep each other safe.