

15th January 2020

Dear Friends,

As I sit and write today I am looking across a very snowy city, the sun is shining and everything is sparkling, I don't know about you, but I love snow, it brings out the child in me. I remember the first time I saw snow quite vividly, that may seem like a strange thing to say, but I was born in Singapore and brought up in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, so snow wasn't something I experienced until I was 9, and visiting my grandparents in Peterborough on a rare trip to England. It was a day very much like today, I remember it well, because for me sunshine meant warmth, and I was captivated by the white stuff and ran outside in bare feet! Needless to say I was inside again pretty quickly.

I was too quick for my grandparents to stop me, but I wonder if I would have believed them if they had told me it was cold, especially as cold did not play a big part in my experience at that point.

As we move through this second phase of lockdown, getting used to the restrictions upon our lives again I have become aware of many rumours circulating about the Covid-19 vaccinations, and even about the virus itself. Some are saying the vaccinations are unsafe or ineffective, there was even a rumour that the vaccine contained meat products with some communities being advised not to receive it if offered. Others say that the virus is a hoax, and protestors have picketed hospitals and put staff and patients, not to mention themselves at risk. While I understand the weariness and the frustration that some are feeling I struggle to see why anyone would construct a global hoax on this scale, especially with the report of 100,000 Covid-19 related deaths in this country. Such sobering statistics!

With the sobering statistics, the dark nights, and the cold of winter I suppose that it is not surprising that many are struggling, so I wonder how we might seek to show the love of God in these days, as we continue to move through the Christmas season (it ends on 2nd February), how we might use that story to inspire and spur us to acts of grace and kindness? In Philippians 2 Paul reminds us of how Christ came among us:

2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus,

*⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,*

*⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.*

And being found in human form,

*⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.*

*⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,*

*¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,*

*in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess*

*that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2: 1-12)

He emptied himself and humbled himself, and as John's gospel reminds us, he was full of grace and truth. What a beautiful picture of the God who does not hold back. I wonder how we might extend that grace towards one another and perhaps even towards ourselves on a down day. Of course all of the things we have talked about many times before still count, supporting foodbanks, looking out for our vulnerable neighbours, an being mindful of parts of the world where healthcare is not available as it is here, but maybe we need to go one step further, examining our attitudes and motivations.

Philippians 2: 7 in the Message version says;

When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process.

In a culture where our rights are often spoken of Jesus shows us another way, choosing love over power, and calling us to do the same. Our world is in need of love at this time, love that reaches out beyond itself to touch the weary, lift the wounded, and heal the broken-hearted. We need to hear Jesus words, "come to me all you who are weary and burdened" and to reach out as those who have taken upon ourselves the yoke of Christ. I leave you with the words of a hymn:

*Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you*

*Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes
Let me rage with you.*

*Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets;
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.*

*Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too.
Let my care be active,
Healing just like you.*

*Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too.
On suspicion's graveyard
Let me dance with you.*

*Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
"Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet."
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few.
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.*

As always you remain in my prayers this week, if you would like to talk just give me a call.



Reverend Sally Coleman 0114 2664637