

John 19: 25-27 – A reflection

It is said that there is a Chinese proverb “may you live in interesting times” a phrase that on the surface sounds great but in reality, presents a world of challenges.

I think it’s fair to say that we are definitely in interesting, indeed almost unprecedented times, at the moment which for many will bring a great deal of stress and worry.

The closure of our churches for public acts of worship may be adding to that stress for you. After all our churches are often our safe places, places of fellowship and love and family – to be without them can leave us feeling bereft – that somehow that church has stopped at the time when we need it most.

But I encourage you to remember that church is not closed – only church buildings are. The church building is where we come on a Sunday to be refreshed and renewed, to equip ourselves for the business of being church out in the world each and every day. The building is not church, the people are. We must and will find new and different ways to get equipped.... for the work of being church is more important now than it’s ever been.

Today is Mothering Sunday, a day when we remember the gifts of mothering, maybe these gifts were offered by our own mothers or, many times, by other significant people in our lives. It’s important to acknowledge that, for the gifts of care and compassion so often associated with motherhood, are something that we are all capable of. With so many within our communities now at home for significant periods of time – whether because they have contracted COVID-19, or are self-isolating, or have now been advised to work from home, and many others being increasingly worried about what the coming days may hold, we each have it within us to offer hope and love and comfort to others through our actions.

It may be as simple as a smile and a wave to check someone is o.k., or as we are seeing, the many random acts of kindness done by people who want to help in any way they can. They all show something of the amazing human spirit and this spirit is something that we, as Christians, are very capable of offering.

Jesus showed us the way on the cross when he told his mother to look after the disciple he loved, and how he told the disciple to treat Mary as his mother, and from that day they cared for one another.

This gospel reminds us that we are all one family under God, and to offer love and help to each other in whatever way we can is one of the most important elements of our faith.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have called for today to be a day of prayer and action, and are encouraging us all to light a candle at 7.00 pm tonight and place it in our window as a sign of solidarity and hope. As we do this we can remember that in all the darkness of this world, the light of Christ can never be extinguished. I encourage you all to join in doing this, and, if you have access, to post pictures to social media and to friends online as a witness to the love that God has for us, a love that nothing can diminish.

As you contemplate the light burning bright be sure to take a breath and remember that the works of God can indeed become manifest in the midst of all this suffering, fear, and worry about what next week will bring.

For the greatest work of God was indeed made manifest on that cross in the midst of the most intense fear and suffering – but even in that – Jesus was able to tend his flock, to look after those he loved.

As our first reading reminds us, we serve a God “who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

So though our church buildings may be closed the church is most assuredly not. We can use this time to be church differently, to devise new and creative ways to demonstrate love and compassion to our communities, alongside the old ways.

We may doubt a great deal in the days and weeks ahead – but I pray you never doubt this; God loves you, he wants the best for you and we can know that we are safe in his care.

As we prepare for whatever will come our way in the future, let us not lose that spirit of giving of ourselves, and wherever possible bring our light, our love into the dark places in this world.

Amen.