

Strange times...

9 APR 2020

A letter from the Bishop of Dudley

These are strange times. I'm the new Bishop of Dudley, and should be living in that area, but I'm writing this letter from under 'lockdown' in our old house in Oxford, unable to move.

It feels as though everything is disrupted and where nothing can be taken for granted. Our church buildings have been closed, and just when we want to gather together and encourage one another, we cannot.

We live in a world filled with fear, attacked by a virus we cannot cure. We can fear death and disease, poverty and unemployment; we can fear for loved ones isolated and far away. We can feel powerless and alone.

When Jesus was taken to be crucified most of his friends ran away, fearing for their lives, afraid that they would be next. But others stayed, mostly women like Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. And then at the foot of the cross, James, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and Mary, Jesus' own mother. They must have been filled with grief and fear, but their love for Jesus was stronger still. Their love was stronger than their fear. They just had to be present with him.

I thank God for shopworkers, health workers, cleaners, carers, foodbank drivers and everyone else who set out to be present for others during this crisis. All those whose love for humanity proves stronger than their fear.

This is the Easter season when we celebrate Jesus risen from the dead. The fear and isolation of Holy Week is past and a new age has begun. In these days between Easter and Pentecost we stand confidently in the warm sunlight of the resurrection, knowing that suffering and death will never have the last word; that God's love is real and unshakeable and in the end will prevail. The bible says, 'Underneath are the Everlasting Arms' and that is true for us as Christians, both in this life and, I believe, when we die.

As we move towards Pentecost we pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit to bless and inspire us for the road ahead. We pray 'Thy Kingdom Come' not with big gatherings and events this year, but online, in prayer, alone or in family groups. We pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it already is in heaven. A kingdom of love, compassion, justice and freedom. Where the people we all depend on in these days: health and care workers, shop staff, drivers and crop pickers, cleaners and refuse collectors and all the rest will no longer be seen as menial or unskilled, but celebrated members of our society on whom we all depend. We need to find a new way of living in tune with the earth and creation, where global riches can be shared and where all can be fed.

I am living through the only global pandemic I have ever known. Its effects are tragic for some, and far reaching for us all. When all this is over we will need to build a better future. And that is something we can all be part of.