

**Wednesday 13th May 2020**

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven”*

*Ecclesiastes 3.1*

Dear Friends

The text above will probably be familiar to you all; it formed part of the bible reading at Sue Davidson’s funeral this week – a comforting reminder that all trials will pass.

Despite all the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 and our response to it, a reminder from scripture that even a virus has a season offers us hope for the future. We are still in the season of Easter, the Christian season when hope takes on deeper and more eternal dimensions; the season in which fear is despatched for ever by God’s redeeming work.

Though I know – however clearly grasped our beliefs might be – that anxiety, stress and fear are real enough and make uncomfortable bedfellows. Living with a sense of permanent uncertainty is simply not something most of us are experienced in.

I’m reading *‘The Spire’* by William Golding currently – a story all about uncertainty. The central character is a very driven Cathedral Dean determined to build a spire on a cathedral that clearly does not have the foundations to support it. It’s a story of one man’s ego and misunderstood sense of vocation verses the wisdom of ordinary tradespeople who can spot foolishness at a hundred yards but don’t have the power or authority to challenge it. I don’t know how the story ends yet, but I suspect the Dean will come crashing to earth at some point, in parallel with the inevitably doomed spire.

Unlike Golding’s unfortunate Dean, we would be well advised to search out wisdom to navigate our difficult days; we need to cherish wisdom, learn from it and live by it. Another book I’ve just finished is Michael Sadgrove’s ‘Wisdom and Ministry’ in which he shares his insights into the wisdom literature of the Bible and how it might be relevant to ministry in the 21st century. Michael Sadgrove was also a Dean (of Durham) and from the evidence of his writing has learnt the value of wisdom – like all of us – the hard way.

As Michael Sadgrove takes us on a journey through the lives of Solomon, Job, David and Daniel, one consistent thread emerges: that wisdom arises through reflection on experience and that flawed lives have within them the potential to become wise elders.

There are some lessons here for us as we continue to live within the strange new world that is COVID-19.

One lesson is not to confuse assigning blame with seeking justice. It’s easy for those of us without responsibility for managing this crisis to point fingers and slide into easy analysis and pithy criticisms. We need to avoid judgement. But that’s not to suggest that there isn’t injustice taking place, for clearly any national tragedy will make more clearly manifest the unhealthy nature of the society underneath. As Christians we should always defend those most at risk from exploitation.

Such nuances are not easily aired in a media-driven world dependent upon headlines, slogans and short messages easily conveyed through social media. Few appear interested in depth of understanding anymore, and very often, truth is hidden deep down.

As Christians, truth is paramount; our entire faith is built upon it. The truth of God’s existence; the truth that each of us is made in the image of God; the truth that every life is of equal value; the truth that the value of a life is measured by God’s love of it and not by any economic criteria; the truth that the most rewarding way to live life is to love it as God does, and to nurture it in one another and in creation for the precious gift that it is.

Our communities continue to demonstrate that the values derived from such principled understandings of the nature of our world, continue to shape our relationships. Tragedy creates the opportunity for love to flourish and our communities continue to be immersed in it – and we all are blessed as a result.

My prayer this week is that such love will also be matched by wisdom. Wisdom rooted in humility before God; wisdom rooted in the trust that only God knows; wisdom rooted in the hope that ‘all will be well’; wisdom rooted in the truth that God needs us to protect one another and His creation.

Go gently through these day – they will pass.

This comes with my continuing love and prayers,

David Ford, Rector

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