

**St Giles Getting Together Creatively:**

**Weekly Message March 29th 2020**

This certainly has been a momentous week! Even a few weeks

ago we could not have imagined that the phrases ‘social distancing’, ‘self-isolation’ and ‘Stay at home to save lives’ would become common currency in our everyday conversations. I had a phone call late Tuesday night to say the funeral I was due to take the following morning would have to be held at the graveside, not in the church, and with the minimum number of attendees. We will all be feeling the impact of confinement as we’ve never known it before – though the Spring sunshine through the week has certainly helped to lift the spirit!

There’s a time-honoured Christian form of contemplation and prayer known as the Examen. It encourages us to review each day in terms of the things which have brought desolation and the things which have brought consolation. Desolation might include the disappointments, frustrations, anxieties and fears of the day, including the things we have left undone. Consolation would include all the things which have given us life, joy, thankfulness and encouragement in the day. I guess we could call it looking for the silver lining. The idea is that through both of these reflections, we discern and discover more of God’s presence and direction for us, taking notice of our emotions and our responses to what we notice around us and within us. It seems to me an honest and helpful way to approach the circumstances we are now facing – holding before God both the deep seriousness of the situation and also the positive opportunities it can afford us. I know I’ve had a good deal of both desolation and consolation in adapting to new technologies this week, it’s good to be learning new skills and finding new ways to meet and get the message across more widely.

We meet very powerfully with both desolation and consolation in our Bible readings this week – Ezekiel Ezekiel faces the desolation of a valley full of dry bones, a stark reminder of so many precious lives lost to death and destruction. The bones reflect the sentiments of the people of Ezekiel’s day, devastated by a seemingly unstoppable external threat: “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off”, they cry. And God hears them. God asks Ezekiel a question, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’. He could have replied, ‘No. Of course they can’t, that’s impossible. Dead bones don’t rise’. But instead, Ezekiel offers a response which allows for other possibilities: ‘Sovereign Lord, you alone know’. Here is a glimmer of faith, of hope, of expectation that God has brought him to these bones for a reason that goes beyond desolation. He is about to see God’s consolation in the most vibrant of ways, but Ezekiel too has to play his part, to ‘Prophesy to these bones’. This is not about foretelling the future, but rather being prompted by God to say the right word, at the right time in the right way – to speak words of life and encouragement. That happened in a wonderful way on Thursday evening with the 8 pm continuous applause for our NHS and frontlines workers. We may not all be Ezekiels, but we can all be those injecting hope into dark times, trusting that the many ‘dry bones’ the impact of Coronavirus brings with it can, in time, be revived and renewed – not just going back to normal but taking whatever lessons we learn through this to readjust the way we live in relation to God, to our planet and to one another. It’s not hard to find examples of consolation around us. In Venice, the decrease in traffic means that the waters there are clear and fish have become visible for the first time in years. A mother shared on the radio how her son who she had been estranged from for 22 years had got back in touch with her to check how she was. I’ve been so moved this week by the messages of thanks, care and willingness to support from our own community, even from behind closed doors. These are just a few of so many examples.

To Mary and Martha’s deep desolation and sense of abandonment in the loss of their brother Lazarus and the added pain of Jesus’ apparently non-sensical delay comes a consolation that goes far beyond anything they expected. Jesus weeps. He doesn’t belittle their grief but shares all the raw impact of it, doubtless seeing in Lazarus’ tomb his own as well. But again, this is not the end of the story, it’s the beginning of a renewal which is soon to reach its full finale in Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead, transforming all the desolation of the cross.

So let’s acknowledge the desolation – the tragic yet sadly inevitable loss of life in conditions that are far less than ideal, the intense pressure especially for those on the front line, but also on home life and livelihoods, the long-term economic impact, not just for us but across so many nations of the world. But let’s be on the look-out for, and attentive to, all the consolation we can find and more than that, be carriers of consolation – on the phone, on social media, in the prayers that we pray – that we will indeed continue to see dry bones coming alive!

Holy Week and Easter are fast approaching. I’m suggesting that we all get creative and make a cross out of things we already have at home and put in on our door or in a window from Palm Sunday through to 3 pm on Good Friday, as a way of marking Holy Week together and reminding our community of the journey of sacrifice and suffering Jesus himself walked for us. Another idea is a Maundy Thursday Meal Together on Thursday April 9th. If we could all arrange to have our meal at 6 pm that evening, thinking of Jesus’ Last Supper with his friends and all our church family at St Giles and elsewhere. This is a way we can ‘gather’ even from our own homes. For those who are able to you might like to send photos or Facetime/What’s App or Zoom others during your meal, sharing virtual dinners! And why not make an Easter Party Hat for Easter Sunday. Again, using things you already have, decorate a hat in a way which tells something of what Easter means to you and let’s wear them in celebration on Easter Sunday morning. You might even like to go out on a walk in it if you can! Let’s keep our togetherness in spirit and in action. Our Volunteer Phone Support Network should also be up and running this week with trusted volunteers from St Giles having a few names of people on our Electoral Roll to keep in contact with by phone just to check how people are getting on over the next weeks and months.

Let’s end with the Collect for today:

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face to you and give you peace.

With much love in Christ

Gail x