

Meditation for Tuesday in Holy Week, 7 April 2020

So here we are on our journey through Holy Week. The joy and excitement of Palm Sunday is behind us and we are on the road to the Cross.

It's a strange time this year to be celebrating. We usually mark Palm Sunday with a procession after we read the Liturgy of the Palms. We remember the people, and especially the children, shouting 'Hosanna!' with joy and in celebration as Jesus enters Jerusalem, the Holy City. They see Jesus as their king. But the crowds give way to increasing isolation through the week as it seems everything the crowd had hoped for begins to crumble. This is no brave, warrior king looking to rid the Jews of their cruel occupiers, the Romans. What use do ordinary people have for someone who is not prepared to risk their life as they ride into battle against the foe? Of course, we know that Jesus was doing just that! The foe was the evil in the world, our sin, which creates an effective wall between human beings and God. And not just human beings, but between the whole of God's own Creation and God! As Paul says brilliantly in his letter to the Christians in Colossae, in Colossians 1:19-20; 'He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.' If you don't recognise this text it may be because it comes from the Message version of the Bible and explains exactly what Paul was trying to say, even if you find the language less than poetic!

But how does any of this relate to what we are experiencing in this, the strangest of Holy Weeks?

As I said earlier, Jesus was to become increasingly isolated during this week, until even his best and most loyal friends would desert him. Imagine for a moment how that must have felt. And of course, it didn't even end there. On the cross before he dies, Jesus cries out in the words of Psalm 22, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Jesus feels totally isolated and abandoned. Is this how we feel this week? Lonely, isolated and abandoned? Possibly! But there is so much happening to connect us virtually that you may feel bombarded with ideas to keep busy. There are so many ideas, services and prayers coming from the National Church, the diocese and many parishes that it is difficult to keep up! But then again, maybe you are reading this on email rather than listening on Facebook because you're wary of using social media or simply haven't felt the need before. Perhaps you do feel more isolated than usual. Life is very different for all of us at the moment depending how comfortable we are with keeping in touch on social media and the various video conferencing platforms.

So how do we deal with the enforced isolation?

Some no doubt, are dealing with it better than others. We are all very different. But there have always been some who have lived in isolation. I have been thinking of the mediaeval mystic, Julian of Norwich. As a very young woman she decided to live the life of an anchorite – someone who voluntarily chose to live in an enclosed cell and never left it. She was, literally a prisoner of her own making. But it enabled her to live a life of prayer and contemplation. The visions she had are well known and people would have visited her for advice. Others, of course, have had isolation imposed upon them with very different results!

In our current isolation from each other we can take comfort that it won't last forever and it will help reduce the spread of the virus. As Julian of Norwich said, 'All will be well and all manner of things will be well.'

We may cry out in our loneliness and isolation as Jesus did, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' But of course, He hasn't, any more than He had forsaken Jesus. He is in it with us. Just look at the sacrifice of the NHS staff, the carers, the food shop workers, the post men and women and many others offering kindness to neighbours, because in their faces, sacrifices and actions we are looking at the face of God.

Jesus will have known in his heart that God, the Father could not and would not leave him. And yet, he still felt utterly abandoned and alone as he was dying on the Cross. So don't worry if you feel angry and abandoned by God in the current situation. Jesus has walked that road before you. And just like him, we will come out the other side into a resurrected life. Then we will realise that God was bearing us up the whole time and in our anguish we didn't even realise it!

'All will be well and all manner of things will be well.'