

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
RESOURCES FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION

14th May 2020

Dear Friends,

During this time of confinement we are continuing to share resources for prayer, poetry, music and reflection. This week we have received the following:

1 Prayers

As we have been commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, we are reminded of the prayer for VE Day from the Act of Commitment for Peace, which speaks into our time also:

Lord God our Father,
we pledge ourselves to serve you and all humankind,
in the cause of peace,
for the relief of want and suffering,
and for the praise of your name.
Guide us by your Spirit;
give us wisdom;
give us courage;
give us hope;
and keep us faithful,
now and always.
Amen.

Pope Francis has suggested that today (14th May) be kept as an interfaith prayer day. A link to the video with prayers from around the world can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8JhiYqzjgU&feature=youtu.be>

2 Reflections

Our Diocesan Bishop, Robert Innes, preached at the Anglican Communion's online service this week. We have been sent a link to the service:

<https://youtu.be/1Zktcbo-aEo> .

The Revd John Swinton is Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care in the University of Aberdeen, specialising in dementia care. He writes:

'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.' 1 John 4.18

One of the things that has become clear in this time of Covid-19 is that being human means being vulnerable.

With the coming of the virus all of us are confronted with our vulnerability at a physical, emotional and spiritual level. There are pluses to that, but there are also negatives. I remember listening to a conversation early on when the virus was just beginning to emerge as a problem. It went something like this: "Yes I know it is serious, but so is the flu. Unless you have an underlying condition there is nothing to worry about." This struck me as understandable, but quite terrifying. ...

Feeling vulnerable can be a breeding ground for unhealthy anxiety. Anxiety breeds fear and fear can very easily drive out love. One way of dealing with anxiety is to project it outwards onto others. "I can cope with this situation as long as I can persuade myself it is happening to someone else; someone who is not like me – *they* are old, vulnerable, sick, disabled – *I* should be safe enough." Of course, now we know that no one is "safe enough," but that dangerous dynamic of coping with anxiety by turning away from people still lingers.

I was in Australia when the crisis began to emerge. The big thing there was people hoarding toilet paper. No one knew why, but everyone knew they had to get it and *lots* of it! It was quite funny, but at another level, there is something deeply troubling about hoarding food and drink (and toilet paper) knowing full well that in doing so we put the weaker members of society at risk. It is a deeply troubling way of dealing with anxiety. The biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann notes that the people of Israel developed a similar "scarcity mentality." They always lived in fear that they wouldn't have enough and even when they did have enough, they lived in fear of losing it. Sounds a bit like us? When our vulnerability is exposed, we discover our very own scarcity mentality.

As Christians, we are called to be generous people who recognise the reality of fear and anxiety - Jesus was pretty anxious as he moved towards the cross - but refused to allow fear to drive out love. Social distancing tempts us to develop an attitude that turns us away from people. Love always draws us towards one another. Love in a time of coronavirus recognises our shared vulnerability and refuses to allow anxiety and fear to drive out the power of God's vulnerable love. Be assured, love will win.

Below is an extract from a homily given last week by Dr Gabriel Byng (a Ministry Experience Scheme intern working with the Anglican Chaplaincy in Vienna) on Julian of Norwich, who is commemorated on 8th May. Dr Byng began by recalling how Julian

had had a series of visions at a time she believed her life was ending through severe illness, but she survived and spent the rest of her life praying and reflecting on her revelations, in a small room beside the church of St Julian in Norwich (after which she is named),.

‘It would be glib, I think, to draw any parallel between Julian’s confinement, so long, so severe and so entirely voluntary, and our own – but at all times, in and out of lockdown, what I find so extraordinarily hopeful about Julian is that of all people, locked away, isolated, hidden, trapped, alone, she would produce a theology so over-brimming with love and comfort. ...

I do not want to suggest that the transformative potential of sickness or confinement will, or even could, be the same for us as it was for Julian – tempting as it is. For many people around the world, this is a time of terrible struggle, in which economic, physical and mental survival is far from certain. There will be positive transformations – but many negative ones too.

Rather, our blessing is that, even if we are not called to be like Julian, we can still be comforted by her and her teachings. Even if we do not find solace in our isolation or transformation in our anxieties, we can be consoled that she did.

Julian entered further into the darkness than most of us will have to – and there, in the most unlikely of places, she found love, enough love to sustain a lifetime. Love is there, she tells us, even if not all of us find it. Few of us will be blessed with her spiritual fortitude, her tenacious joy, her simple poetry – but all of us can find assurance in what she told us about the most threatening, desperate moments of human experience.

And so I will risk cliché by ending with the most moving, astonishing, reassuring words that Julian wrote, after fifteen years living in her anchorage, words that, to my mind at least, 600 years after they were written, light up the Christian message with all its energy and beauty:

Wouldst thou learn thy Lord’s meaning in this thing? Learn it well: Love was His meaning. Who shewed it thee? Love. What shewed He thee? Love. Why shewed it He? For Love. [...] Thus was I taught that Love was our Lord’s meaning.’

3 Poetry

‘We’re learning that so much of what we’ve taken for granted can’t now be taken for granted; and we wonder when – or if – it will ever be taken for granted again. In many ways life is a constant balance of risk and trust: we try to place as much as we can in the area of trust (although if it’s too much we can say it’s boring); we can’t cope with

too much risk – especially if, in our formative years, we’ve lacked relationships of trust or been let down in the ones we thought we had.

But perhaps we’ve always taken too much for granted. The fourteenth century mystic Hafiz offers a provocative insight in this short poem.

Even
After
All this time
The sun never says to the earth,

‘You owe
Me.’

Look
What happens
With a love like that,
It lights the
Whole
Sky.

At the centre of faith lie awe, trust and love. This poem communicates all of them – but places them in a lively tension. If we come out of this crisis period in reasonable shape, it won’t be because someone owes us – it’ll be because someone’s supporting us like the sun lights up the earth.

If we become bigger people, I hope it will be bigger most of all in gratitude, for those people, invariably hidden and unregarded, who make our lives possible. This weekend we think of those who did so in the Second World War. In the future, we’ll recall those who did so in this virus season. What could be better than to become such a person ourselves: one who makes the life of others better; a blessing.

The Revd Dr Sam Wells

4 Sacred music

Sacred music for this season can be found at the following links:

Hymn – Love is the touch of intangible joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIBAX0cCKel>

Taizé Chant - Surrexit Christus (Taizé)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7s8lfRdz5U>

5 Resources

Justine Allain Chapman, the Archdeacon of Boston (Lincolnshire), has written an A to Z of resilience in lockdown. It is too long to print in this letter, but a link to it can be found here:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/15-may/comment/opinion/an-a-z-of-resilience-in-lockdown>

(If the link is no longer available please contact the chaplaincy and we will email you a copy.)

Last week we mentioned the annual Christian Aid Week appeal, which is due to end on Saturday, 16th May. Just a reminder that donations may be made at:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week>

6 And finally ...

A lawyer writes with refreshing candour on the experience of working from home:

‘From a personal perspective, I have no idea why I thought going into lockdown would be brilliant. I imagined that my house would be immaculate, my kids would be mini geniuses with home schooling, and that I would be super healthy eating avocado every day. Five weeks later, my house is a mess, my six-year-old has forgotten how to spell her name, and chicken dippers and chips seem to be on the menu every day.’

May the risen Christ be with us through the coming week, strengthening us in faith, hope and love.

With every blessing,

The Revd Jamie Johnston
Chaplain