

6th May 2020
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As we head toward our eighth Sunday of 'Virch' I find myself wondering what it will be like to go 'live' when we can congregate in our church buildings once more. The little routines and patterns of life have been interrupted and I wonder if we will pick them up, as if nothing had happened, or if we may have forgotten them and developed new ones instead.

Certainly, there will be some changes. The way we begin to emerge from lockdown will probably be a gradual process as we try to maintain the safety of our more vulnerable members and indeed our own. I envisage, perhaps, the continued observance of social distancing so that we have to sit further apart than usual. We probably won't be able to share the peace as usual, not even with elbows. Perhaps a slight bow will have to suffice. It all sounds rather more serious than the Sunday of Lent 4 when the new ways of sharing the peace seemed like such fun as we were all trying different things!

Whatever the new rules may be, at least it will be good to be worshipping with other people present and with a more visible sense of community. This should not, however, lead to some kind of abandonment of those who will still be unable to join us, physically. We will still need to provide some way of engaging people in a way that offers real and rewarding spiritual contact with God and their fellow Christians. That's not to say that God isn't always with us, whether we are aware of it or not. It's simply a recognition that, one of the functions of gathered church communities is simply that, we are together. We mix with other Christians to worship, to share fellowship, to feel the very real love and support of others.

We will have to continue to be innovative and flexible about what we think of as worship and how we practice it in reality. It may well be that the advent of the C-19 virus and the subsequent restrictions that it has laid upon us, may well make us a more thoughtful and effective force for sharing the Gospel. The Church has always been able to adapt to the cultures in which it finds itself and that's part of the beauty of being a member of a Church that is ready and willing to be what it needs to be in order to show the love of God to His world. That doesn't mean we throw out the baby with the bath water, as it were, there are many traditions and truths which it is right to maintain. But the interface of Church and the secular world should, in my opinion, always be something that's in flux. Change is a sign of something that's living and growing and must, therefore, be something that is true of the church and it works the other way round too. The Church should be something that has a part in how the people we meet and the world in which we are set, changes as well.

Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, this is not the journey that any of us were expecting to take but it is the journey on which Jesus joins us and we may take comfort in that.

Tom.

And finally...A Bishop attended one of his remoter parishes and as he walked down the aisle he noticed that only five people were present. He asked the vicar, "Did you tell the congregation I was coming?" "No," replied the vicar, "but heaven help the person who did".

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