

Reflections and Prayers – responding to the crisis – frustration

This is the 11th in a series of weekly Reflections and Prayers being offered to the Norley Methodist Church congregation and to colleagues and friends in many places near and far. They are kindly sourced by many people. You are invited to use them freely for personal reflection and to share and retain them as you wish.

Introduction

During the next few weeks we shall reflect on some of the natural reactions and emotions we are experiencing to the present coronavirus crisis: frustration, loneliness and fear, dependence and kindness and the absence of corporate worship. They may be interconnected and overlapping but each has distinctive aspects. This week, frustration.

The Whitegate Way



As locals know, the Whitegate Way, a so-called linear park, runs from Cuddington to Winsford in Cheshire, along the path of a former railway branch line whose main purpose was to carry salt from the Winsford mines across Britain via the national rail network. Whatever else you may associate with the county of Cheshire, you may be reassured to learn that, beneath it, there is salt enough to satisfy UK consumption until the year AD 32,000. Opened in 1870, this railway closed to passengers in 1931 and to freight in 1967: the tracks were ripped up and, in the 1970s, it became a delightfully level 6-mile bridleway. In topical parlance, it became a ‘new normal’.

It was one of many railway lines branded and finally closed during the Beeching era as uneconomic: some were then, but not all. Overnight, the city of Ripon in North Yorkshire lost not only its railway link but a direct Pullman Service (the ‘Queen of Scots’) on its journey between London and Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow. In many places across the country there was frustration and even anger at these draconian measures, many of which have since proved ill-advised (even if, in the short-term, we are encouraged to avoid public transport): indeed some have been reopened, at least in part.

From childhood to old age, many things frustrate us; some trivial, some important. Some arise from our own impatience or shortcomings – we can’t quite finish the crossword or ten-mile walk; some are totally outside our control – the closure of railway lines or advent of coronavirus. Some are short-lived – a bout of flu; some are long-lasting – the incapacitating effects of a serious stroke.

At present, most of us are experiencing a sense of frustration, sometimes to the point of anger, coupled with feelings of helplessness and impotence. We can’t meet family members and give them a hug; we can’t all go to work or to school; we can’t go away even for one night, let alone have a proper holiday; we can’t shop in the normal relaxing (?) way; we can’t go out for meals with friends or hold birthday celebrations; we can’t go to church on Sunday morning to praise, pray and worship God together; we can’t tend loved ones in their dying hours or all attend a dignified funeral, let alone a service of thanksgiving; we can’t.....we just can’t.

John Bell, prompted by Joan’s photo, whilst walking along the Whitegate Way, Cheshire, June 2020.

A PSALM OF LAMENT AND PRAISE IN A TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

How shall we praise you, Lord, our God?
When we are locked down,
how shall we praise you?
When the doors to your house are barred,
and your people cannot assemble?
When those desperately in need of money and work
cannot even wait in the marketplace?

When we have to circle round people in the street,
and to queue for shops whilst maintaining safe distance?
When we can only communicate
by hearing on the phone,
or seeing on the screen;
or digitally messaging,
or even just waving through a window?
When we cannot meet our parents and children,
grandparents and grandchildren,
or other family members and friends?
When we cannot touch them in their flesh and blood,
to know they are really alive?
How shall we praise you?
How, like Thomas, shall we not see, yet believe
that your son is raised among us?
How shall we praise you?

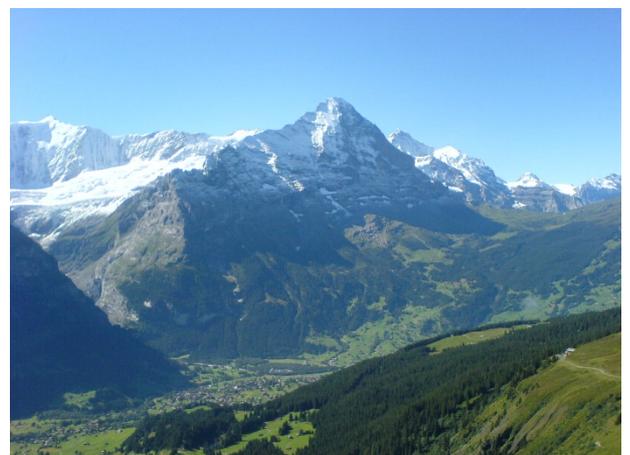


How can I praise you, Lord?
Are you plaguing us with this virus to
punish us because we have all done
wrong,
or thought wrongly,
or felt wrongly,
or just been wrong?
If so, why do only some die,
and those, apparently, the ones who are
the least worst or most caring amongst us?
Or are you trying to teach us a lesson?
If so, why is it so hard to learn?
And how are we to find the answer when
we do not even know the question?
*A deserted Market Street, Manchester, May
2020*

Or are you still the same loving God,
coming to us in our sufferings
and opening up the way to new life in Jesus?

Lord, I will try to praise you.
Through gritted teeth,
I will try to praise you.
I will try to remember that you have created all things,
and this virus is part of your creation.
I will try not to hate it
but seek to mitigate its harm.
I will try to keep myself and others safe.
I will work to pray for them
and seek to help in whatever way I can.

Lord, when I cannot pray or worship
help me be aware of all your people
and your saints and angels
Photo by John Bell, the Eiger and Grindelwald, Switzerland
hovering around me,
lifting me up.
When I feel alone,
let me feel you near me,



even if only for a moment that enables me to go on.

Let me hear you say
"Peace be with you".

Lord, I will praise you.
Let all the peoples praise you.



Wesley's Chapel, London

Revd Ken Howcroft, former President of the Methodist Conference, currently President of Governors, the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, April 2020.

Prayers of intercession

We offer our prayers with and for people who are deeply frustrated at this time of unexpected and unplanned circumstances outside their control:

- Working people whose employment and businesses are on hold, struggling to make ends meet.
- Seafarers, confined to their ships, unable to return to their home countries to join their families as they had anticipated.
- Cancer sufferers, experiencing potentially life-threatening delays to diagnosis and treatment, and those who anxiously wait with them.
- People shielded for fear of infection, often alone, unable for so long to leave their homes.
- Residents of care homes, especially those suffering from dementia who are unable to comprehend what is happening, why their daily routine is constrained and why nobody comes to visit.
- Families, feeling helpless, unable to meet with and tend their loved ones in their own, residential or nursing homes, in hospitals and hospices.
- MHA, their residents, staff and volunteers, as we celebrate their work this Sunday.
- Children, denied playing out, meeting their friends, going to school, being normal.
- Young people facing interruptions to their higher education or unable to find employment.
- Many others, known to each of us, we bring them to mind and name them in our prayers.
- And ourselves, whatever our frustrations.

Loving God, grant us all calm and peace.
In the name of Jesus. Amen.



Callin Court MHA, Chester. MHA, formerly known as Methodist Homes for the Aged, was founded in 1943 and now has 90 locations providing a range of care services to 18,500 mostly older people, some in their own homes.

John Bell, June 2020

Note and encouragement to all readers

I have collected and compiled these reflections and prayers, including some of my own thoughts. If you wish to offer pieces for inclusion in future weeks, please send them to me at johnabell@supanet.com Each edition will be released on a Friday so that it can be distributed for Sunday and the following week.

Hymns are referenced from their most recent publication in a British Methodist hymn book (Singing the Faith – StF, Hymns and Psalms – H&P, or even the 1933 Methodist Hymnbook – MHB) and, for URC readers, in Rejoice and Sing (R&S), the URC's present hymnal.