

The Seed

Brancepeth, Good Friday, 10 April 2020

Isaiah 52: 13 – 53:12

John 18: 28 – 19:37

*Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word and know your voice.
Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills,
that we may serve you today and always. Amen*

I am glad that we can meet like this.
It is good to be able to see you all, arranged across my screen
– but I have to confess that *I really do **not** want to be here.*

I want to be in our *church*,
with the light coming in through the windows,
and the sense of space, and the sense of community.

I don't want to be speaking to you through a screen,
worrying that the internet connection might cut out.
I want to be standing there with you all around me,
all gathered together in one place.

I don't want to click the 'Leave Meeting' button at the end,
and see all your images suddenly vanish –
I want to be part of the normal press of people
once we've finished,
greeting each other, passing the time of day.
I want all this to be over.
I don't want to be here.

If we *were* all in St Brandon's now, however,
I would be scared.
We are living in a world where another person's touch –
a handshake, a hug – can be dangerous;
where someone standing closer to me than two metres
is a threat;
where what should be a good thing, a precious thing

– our closeness, our contact –
has been corrupted, and become fatal.

We are living in a world of contagion,
a world where harm can pass from person to person, infectious and unstoppable.
I really *don't* want to be here.

These are extraordinary times, and
the threats and restrictions we face are unprecedented.
In one way, however, they simply dramatize
one of the ordinary, the all too ordinary truths of our world.
Life is always precarious –
and it is more precarious for most people, most of the time,
than it normally is for us.

The presence of others, the touch of others
can always be a threat –
and for some people, for many people,
that threat is something they live with day in, day out,
year in, year out, coronavirus or no coronavirus.
There has been a horrible rise in domestic violence
during this lockdown, for instance –
but such violence was a pandemic
before ever coronavirus started circulating.

All of us, all the time, live in the midst of contagious harm
– of evils that we contract and then pass on,
harm that is done to us that we in our turn do to others.
We live in the same world seen by Isaiah –
a world of infectious transgressions and virulent iniquities.

We act out of fear,
and make the world more fearful for others.
We act in panic,
desperate to preserve ourselves and our families,
and our intemperate actions prompt panic in others.
We fall in to despair,
and in falling drag others down with us.
Harm circulates,
and it doesn't need us to shake hands or to stand too close
to be transmitted.

That's the world we live in –
a precarious world, a fearful world, a world locked down.

Our service today, this Good Friday,
is about God's response to this world.
And I want you to notice one thing about that response.
When Jesus stands before Pilate,
questioned about his authority,
he does *not* say that his kingdom is 'not *of* this world'.
He says that it is 'not *from* this world'.

Jesus is not someone otherworldly –
someone unaffected by the mess in which we live.
He doesn't float above the mud through which we slog.
He doesn't live a life apart,
safely isolated from our contagious hands.
He lives, and dies, and rises,
right here in the midst of this world.
His kingdom is *in* this world. *Right* in this world.

But Jesus does not live in this world
in the way that we live in it.
He lives a different kind of life –
a life that does not pass on harm,
a life that is not driven by fear or shattered by panic,
a life that does not drag others down.

His kingdom is not *from* this world, but from God –
and he lives the life of God right here in our midst.
He *is* the life of God, right here in our midst.

Jesus is our rescue –
a hand held out, lovingly, *safely*, by God.
But he does not deliver us *from* this world.
I've said that I don't want to be here –
but Jesus won't whisk me away.
Turning to him, I won't find an escape route,
a door that takes me safely out of this contagious,
precarious world.
Grasping hold of his hand,
I won't find that I am lifted far above all this mess,

no longer affected by this world's restrictions and dangers.
That is not God's response.

God's response to the world we live in –
God's response to all that we fear, all that restricts us,
all that causes us grief –
is to *plant* something here.
God's response is to plant something different,
to plant new life,
to plant a different way of thinking, and feeling, and acting,
right here in the midst of the world we inhabit.
God's response is not to leave us alone,
but to come to us –
to share our life, our lockdown, our messed up world,
so that we in turn can share God's life –
so that we can be wrapped by, caught up in,
gathered together by, the life that God plants here.

On Good Friday,
we see Jesus right in the midst of the world we have made.
Buffeted by it. Harmed by it.
Overtaken and overwhelmed by it. *Killed* by it.
Suffering the consequences of all our transgressions,
all our iniquities – all our contagions.
We see him right in the midst of it –
but we see him
refusing to live as this world expects him to live.
In the midst of what is fearful, and *feeling* that fear,
he refuses to be defined by it.
In the midst of what is harmful, and *harmed* by it,
he refuses to pass that harm on.
In the midst of all that makes God's presence hard to see, and with his own view
upwards blocked,
he refuses to lose faith in his Father.
Right in the midst of the contagious harm, the deadly harm, of our world, he lives
differently
– even on the cross, reaching out to Mary and to John,
bringing them together,
knotting together the bonds of a community
that will outlast this dark day.

Jesus lives God's life, righteous life, holy life, the life of love,
right in the midst of all the harm that we do –
even though it costs him everything.

And by that means,
God plants a seed –
right here in the mud, right here in the soil of our world.

There was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified –
a garden with a bed already dug, and waiting.

And Jesus' body –
the body of this man who lived differently,
who lived God's life –
Jesus' body is planted there, today, in the dark earth, dead.

But this is God's planting, and now –
invisibly still, under the soil,
not yet on this Good Friday breaking the surface –
now the green blade is rising
– and our world holds its breath.