

Sermon – God in pyjamas

The process of writing this sermon has been a unique one. All sermons have their own life and all could be said to be unique, but this one has definitely had an extra quality to it. The reason is not difficult to work out. The situation of being in lockdown has presented us all with a whole new environment and somehow everything – from the time we might get up in the morning or go to bed, the way in which we eat, the exercise we take, the clothes we wear (if indeed we get out of our pyjamas at all on some days) – everything has a different feel to it.

These past few weeks have been difficult for me. Some of you will know that since the beginning of March I have been ill. Firstly with a virus that was probably Covid-19 (although we can't be sure because I wasn't tested), then with a bacterial infection (apparently this is common after Covid-19). This took two courses of anti-biotics to combat. Finally, and most challenging, the post-viral fatigue that has come with it and that is still around, and may be for several weeks to come. The thing that has hit me the most in this – perhaps because it feels so unlike me – is the impact it has had on my mental health. Something I have not really had to deal with before. Severe mood swings and periods of depression are new experiences for me – and, unsurprisingly, not easy. The extra space and time that the lockdown has given me has been both helpful and painful. I need this space in order to get better – physically, emotionally and mentally. But it leaves a lot of time when I cannot escape into activity. My usual default. I am lucky because I can still do my job from home, but this still leaves many hours of stillness – especially as I do not have the energy to work at my usual level.

I recognise that my situation is not unusual, if not in the specifics then in the overall outcome. For me the time and space has been a blessing and a curse. For others I know who are working on the front line, if anything they have less time and less space. They are seeing more people than usual, working longer hours, and have less time to contemplate any meaning in all of this. This is also true for many parents who are juggling having their children all day with all of the other activities they would normally be doing. Working, eating and sleeping is what occupies many people most of the time. Energy or time for anything else is rare.

Each of us will be experiencing our own challenges. And each of those challenges is valid. I think one of the hardest things is to be kind to ourselves in this. Of course it is important to recognise that others may well be a lot worse off. A sense of perspective is important. But it is just as important to acknowledge our own suffering in this, in whatever form it is taking.

One element which can be difficult – although it is meant to be the opposite – is the pressure to “take advantage” of this space and time. And by this I mean a pressure that can sometimes be felt to somehow become more spiritually aware, as if the lockdown were a crash course in spiritual discipline and understanding. I don’t mean by this that we shouldn’t take the opportunity to recognise how we can use any greater level of peace or time we may have at the moment to develop ourselves inwardly. Of course this is something that can give us great assurance and grounding in a very difficult time. However, space, silence, time, does not always feel friendly. We do not always have the energy or the courage to say, “great. I have all this time. I shall sit and pray. I shall walk for hours and contemplate the beauty of God’s creation.” All of these things are very valuable. I think it is good for all of us to take the opportunity to do it when we are able. But I am also aware that there are days when spiritual awakesness just feels too tiring. Or, maybe where you can have that spiritual awakesness in a way that is far less conscious. And maybe *that* is what you need right then.

In our reading today, Paul is discussing where we may find God. That God is not in shrines or idols external to ourselves. One of my favourite verses, often used in liturgy, is written here, “In Him we live and move and have our being.” And I started to contemplate what this may mean in these times. Paul says that “we may grope for God, though indeed he is not far from each one of us”. And I think this is so important to remember now. This space and silence that we are given is full of so much. Pain, joy, uncertainty, hope, fear. All of these things reside in us – but so does God. And this can be easy to forget. Sometimes because of these feelings we experience, we do grope for God. We do find that we pressure ourselves to be better, to search and know God because now we have the time to do it. And if we can’t do it now, we are not using this extra time and space properly. But we do not need to grope for God. We do live and move and have our being in him. And this means that God is there with all of those feelings, that sense of uncertainty, that fear, that joy, that despair. Maybe the thing to remember is just to sit and allow. And sometimes this may not be conscious. Sometimes this may not seem like prayer at all. Sometimes it may just be that you are exhausted, and you are allowing yourself to be kind to yourself. You are taking the time to do some activity that you

enjoy or to watch some mindless TV programme in your pyjamas. And God will be in that – without you having to seek him out. Without you having to be consciously awake to her presence. She will not desert you. Sometimes this is the hardest thing to acknowledge. You are enough for God. Your pain does not invalidate you. Nor do you need it in order to be enough. Whatever this lockdown is doing to your life and however you respond to it, the main thing to remember within it is love. Love of others, love of yourself and the love that God will forever embrace you with.

Anne Padget

17.05.2020