

A Reflection for Sunday 3^d January 2020 from Suzanne, Churchwarden at Fillongley

So here we are in 2021 ~ a year which holds so much promise for our release from the claws of the Covid-19 virus. Whilst deciding what it was appropriate to say today I came across these words from the author, Haruki Murakami :

“And once the storm is over, you won’t remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won’t even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what the storm is all about.”

It is certainly very true that many of us are not the same as when we locked ourselves down last March and tried to do all we could to keep ourselves and those around us safe.

- **We have all** had time to reassess our lives and to decide what is really important, what are our priorities.
- **We have all** experienced a variety of emotions ~ sadness, fear, joy, resignation, anger, love, appreciation, peace, loss, guilt.... The list goes on.
- **We have all** reflected on our lives before the pandemic, many suggesting that the advent of the virus was a tragedy waiting to happen as a result of how we have lived our lives and how we have treated our world.
- **We have all** been forced to ask ourselves, do we really want to go back to how things were or would be rather make a break with the past and reimagine our world anew?

Historically, this is what pandemics have done to the human race ~ cause us to think again about how we want to live. Putting it bluntly, we can either choose to go forward dragging all our prejudice, hatred, avarice and our damaged environment with us, or we can go forward with a spring in our step, with little luggage, ready to reimagine another world and ready to fight for it.

We have all, I am sure, had that feeling of disorientation, the feeling that this just really isn’t happening and for me this has manifested itself most strongly when reading or perhaps re-reading familiar Bible passages, and goodness knows there has been enough time for reading! I know of at least two people in Fillongley who have been reading the Bible from start to finish during 2020.

So what is God saying to us as time and time again the Bible verses we read bring us up short, give us a jolt and a moment of realisation.....

Here are just a few examples ~

In the book of Deuteronomy we read: ³⁰ *“In the distant future, when you are suffering all these things, you will finally return to the LORD your God and listen to what he tells you. ³¹ For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors. Deut 4: vs 30-31*

Psalms 91 says: ⁹ *If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, ¹⁰ no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. Psalm 91 vs 9-10*

The prophet Isaiah has this message from God: ¹⁰ *Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41: vs 10*

In John’s Gospel, Jesus’ words reassure us: ¹⁶ *You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other. John 15: vs 16-17*

And finally, St Paul's words to the Romans are still so appropriate today: *¹³ I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15: vs 13*

The overall message from all these passages is one of reassurance that God is always with us, he will always help us and support us. He wants us to always love one another and to look forward with hope.

Think about what you have learnt from your 2020 experience ~ the importance of contact with family, friends and community, the importance of your work or your school, your hobbies, a healthy diet and exercise alongside your faith, and the importance of caring for the vulnerable, shared by us all.

All the activities in which we have taken part ~ like phoning, texting, & emailing each other, home schooling, joining Virtual Choir rehearsals, meeting on Zoom, holding distanced coffee mornings, knitting, crochet & sewing sessions, shopping for others, "going to church" via a website, eBulletin or YouTube, to name just a few, and all the technical skills that we have acquired in order to do some of this have all been part of our fundamental aims ~ to keep in touch, to support each other, and to support those who are most vulnerable ~ physically, mentally and spiritually.

There have been so many surprises ~ we now know what wonderful neighbours we have, how friendly and kind so many people are, how great the key workers are: posties, delivery people, NHS workers, how generous people are to charities, & how fortunate we are to live in this wonderful world and to have time to notice and appreciate it so much more than usual.

All of this we take into the "new normal" ready to help repair the world which God created for us and with the help of his son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are more than capable of achieving this.

Amen.