

Daily life is changing. As more places open we are seeing more people out and about, although sometimes it seems that the concept of physically distancing has been forgotten and here at the Manse we worry that things are going too fast without allowing time to see what happens with the changes that have been made. The softly, softly approach must be the sensible way forward.



If someone had told us at the beginning of the year we would spend three months in comparative isolation, on our own little desert islands, we would have laughed and said impossible. If we ever wondered about Robinson Crusoe then for many this has been something of that experience, although within the church communities I believe there has been a web of communication which has helped. For others, not tied into a fellowship community and with no relatives, or none near enough to help, this has been a very lonely time and has highlighted the desperate need for community within society.

Many communities have responded and there have been some wonderful stories of help and support but for the person living on their own these are a small oasis in the desert of loneliness. Even before Covid and Lockdown doctors were very concerned about the epidemic of loneliness that they saw all around them and it is recognised that loneliness is a bigger threat to health than heart disease, obesity and strokes and we know how big a threat these things are. As we learn to live in the new normal the challenge is to grow these new community connections and as church we can discover a new 'mission' of being the connecting hub that helps people to feel a sense of belonging which will counter the loneliness.



This experience has given us all an opportunity to discover and value the important things in life. Looking around this week it would be easy to think that clothes seem to be especially important with roads being closed as people queue to enter the newly opened clothes stores. It is interesting which stores have had the longest queues and we might feel dispirited that, amidst this time of learning, society does not seem to have learnt anything about sustainability when it comes to clothes. I don't know about you but I have not really used many of my 'going out' clothes for three months, only changing the top half for zoom meetings and the rest of the time relaxing in joggers and tee shirts, I don't need any new clothes. So, what is really behind those queues, is it about grasping at normality, is it about relieving boredom or is it about being with people? I suspect it is all three and in that is the learning, we like routine, we have forgotten how to 'be' and fill our time with activities that help us relax and explore something of who we are, hobbies, instead the norm has become 'doing', and especially going out to do, and finally we need each other. These are all important things to remember as we move forward from Lockdown. In Africa there is a word, Ubuntu, which means I am who I am through my relationships with others, I only really exist in relationship.



In church we often talk about our relationship with God, but the reality is that only really exists through our relationships with one another. Spiritually, we are stronger the more people we connect with, and with whom we explore what it means to be fully human. Periods of contemplation and retreat are valuable in our own personal evaluating of who we are, time to reflect upon our experiences and how we have dealt with them and how we could have dealt with them, but the purpose of that should be to inform our future actions and relationships. The practice of being together in community is the most important aspect of our journey to full humanity. This makes the enforced Lockdown all the harder as we have had plenty of reflection time, and now we need to find ways of being community, apart but together.

We are at the summer solstice, we can look forward to pleasant weather, and perhaps we need to begin arranging garden groups. This has been happening of course as families have gathered in gardens, and in some apartment blocks the residents have had informal gatherings for afternoon tea. As we seek to alleviate loneliness, perhaps we can widen this to include those who are on their own in our streets, or in our churches. We could make this extraordinary year of 2020 a celebration of the summer of love, building community in a whole new way.

