

Thoughts from the Manse 10th July 2020

This week I received an article about the emotional trauma of Lockdown, but also the trauma of easing out of Lockdown. Two things in this article got me thinking, the first was a reference to an African tale, and the second was an invitation to reflect on 'resilience'. Let me begin by sharing with you the African tale.



It is said that a man ventured into the inhospitable lands of Africa. Only his porters accompanied him. They each carried a machete in their hands, and they made their way through the thick vegetation. Their aim was to keep going at any cost. If a river appeared, they would cross it in the shortest time possible. If there was a hill, they quickened their pace so as not to waste a minute.

But suddenly the porters stopped. The explorer was surprised. They had only been walking for a few hours. So, he asked them: *"Why have you stopped? Are you already tired after just a few hours walking?"* Then one of the porters looked at him and said: *"No sir, we are not tired. It's just that we have been moving very quickly so we have left our soul behind. Now we have to wait for it to catch up with us again."*

Lockdown has been different for everyone. Some people have found it interminable, each day empty of the usual things, and for them time has almost stopped alongside life. For others, particularly those still working, it has often felt like a race against time as new ways of working have been bombarding them each new day. It means that they have been running on adrenaline for far too long, and a break will be needed to allow the body to normalise. However, this story reminds us that an emotional/ spiritual break is also needed, as the article said 'we have travelled so far, so fast, that now it is time to sit, and let our souls catch up'. Even if you have not been working there is still much to evaluate as our priorities have been challenged alongside many assumptions about life, including about church. We all know, even if we are reluctant to accept it, that the future will be different, we will not be returning to normal but rather emerging into a new normal, the shape of which is not yet finalised. This leads me to the second prompt from the article – resilience.



The dictionary gives two meanings: springy, the ability to spring back to the original form after being bent; (of a person) readily recovering from a shock or illness. Most of us will have heard comment on the resilience of children but I wonder at what point we ever stop to question our adult resilience? It is often said that resilience is the ability to 'bounce back', and certainly that ties in with the first definition but is it more the ability to 'bounce', or indeed 'bounce forward' from whatever life springs on us. Sometimes life just keeps hurling things at you and if all you do is keep bouncing back you are not journeying; you are trapped in a Groundhog Day scenario. The article gave three symbolic examples of resilience and asks which do you identify with – a rock with the sea constantly swirling around, a rooted tree flexible and yet grounded, or a sand dune with the sand at the will of the wind being picked up and formed into a different shape. Three very different pictures of resilience, the rock unbending, the tree bending and the sand totally free and yet always sand. How each of us deals with the effects of Lockdown will depend on at least two things, our personal experience and our approach to resilience. What probably does not change is that we all need to take time to reflect, to let our souls catch up with where we have travelled.



Cascading Life

Standing in the torrent of life we can feel cut off, hidden from view.

As life cascades over us we are blind to the beauty around us.

As life, like the waterfall, brings unexpected debris we feel trapped with nowhere to escape.

But this falling water is of God. We can stand firm, held in the love of God.

Holding on to each other we can withstand the debris of life.

Using our God given imagination we can see beyond the torrent to a garden.

Holding our breath and feeling our way we can move through the cascade to emerge as a child of God in the garden of life.

Sustaining God, strengthen us as we stand in the waterfall of life. (H Whyte 2011)

