

## HAS THE WORLD FINALLY BEGUN TO WAKE UP?

It seems, like Leonard Cohen once said, “There is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in”, that this dark and mysterious coronavirus pandemic is letting the light in. With the world having almost grounded to a halt, it seems that the human spirit has finally taken flight.

Let’s just pause a moment and simply look and see what is happening in this global crisis: the homeless are (in some places) housed in hotels while prisoners are (in others) being released. Children are being told not to go to school and to forget about exams. Massive government spending is ensuring that people are guaranteed an income even if they cannot work. A hospital in London has been built in less than two weeks. In Portugal, tens of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers have been “regularised” and given full rights. More people than ever are “tuning in” to on-line streaming of religious services far exceeding physical attendance in churches, synagogues and mosques. People are talking to strangers and estranged family members for the first time in years. Perhaps it is not a revolution, but it is an amazing awakening.

Despite the strangeness this lockdown has created, especially through the social distancing that has to happen and that our social activities have halted to a stop, the world seems to have come right in some kind of way. Wildlife is returning with innocent excitement and air pollution has never been as low for years. As I walked out on an early Easter Sunday morning, I could feel the air perfumed with spring. Every Thursday night at 8.00pm for the last month, there has been a plethora of applause for all the key workers for what they do. We have begun to see through the cracks the goodness of people that we have not always appreciated. As a global community we have become more serious about the truth and this pandemic has awoken us to persuade social media companies of the need to combat fake news and conspiracy theories, rather than relying on referendums and elections.

We have also become more aware of the fact that we are so interdependent on one another. At these times under the lockdown people can make each other sick and we try to make each other well. There is an incredible awareness that social distancing is a sacrifice for a greater good and that the wellbeing of the group is endangered by indifferent individuals, and that community, which originally meant “pooling of duties” can become more real for us at this time. As Simone Weil once wrote, “the notion of obligations comes before that of rights”. In the last few weeks, I have witnessed knee-jerk annoyance being replaced by gratitude and applause.

The lockdown has made everything more local; we are discovering corner shops and neighbours in a new way. Perhaps too we are becoming more reflective. Most of us before the lockdown lived busy, hectic lives with hardly any time to be still and quiet. Of course, these Quaker-like moments can also unleash unwanted demons, which can lead to panic attacks, re-enforcing people’s aloneness that comes with being deprived of the intimacy of family and loved ones. However, this pandemic is also becoming a driving force in bringing such issues out into the open, and perhaps because of communities like ours we can be, as Henri Nouwen says, a place where “...wounds and pains become openings or

occasions for a new vision.” It is good to see that there has been such an immense emphasis on the “heroes” during this pandemic - the doctors and nurses on the front line in the NHS, key workers in the shops, the delivery people, and the many others carrying out vital services, especially for the elderly, the vulnerable and those in isolation. But, for the majority of us heroism is much subtler and quieter: it’s about restraint and retreat, solitude and stillness, and perhaps our quest is much harder – to discern the common good and look for a light shining in the darkness.

What must have the disciples felt in the upper room on that first Easter Sunday evening? Locked away (lockdown?) and huddled together in fear, isolated, cut off from the rest of the world. Yet through these closed doors Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you”, and showed them his hands and his side. Maybe Jesus, showing his disciples his wounds, they would begin to see openings for a new vision to emerge. During these strange days of lockdown, Jesus enters into our isolation, our closed doors, our limited, restricted spaces, like light shining through the cracks, and still he brings us his peace. This is what gives communities, like ours, an edge on the rest of society. That’s why Jesus breathed on them the Holy Spirit, as he does on us. There was no fanfare, no clap of thunder, no exuberant applause, only a gentle breathing where the Holy Spirit entered the broken, fearful hearts of the disciples and filled them with peace.

PS

During the pandemic the number of crimes has increased – just have a look at these police investigations:

A consignment of wigs has been stolen. Police are combing the area.

A lorry load of prunes has been stolen. Police say thieves are still on the run.

After a number of people have been stabbed with knitting needles, police believe the crimes may be following some kind of pattern.

The police have found a wanted man holding out in a public toilet. Eventually they managed to flush him out.

Police say a criminal midget clairvoyant has escaped from prison. They are looking for a small medium at large.