

Discipleship in Difficult Days

The following resources come from Dr. Clare Amos, Director of Lay Discipleship in the Church of England Diocese in Europe.

Prayers and reflections

For Christian community

We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.
We are your people God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs
For as long as it takes
wherever you call us.

(Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference)

St Patrick's day, March 17, fell during the last week. It was a St Patrick's day with a difference – without the usual parades and celebrations. But the lines from the great hymn, *St Patrick's Breastplate*, seem more relevant than ever:

Christ be with me,
Christ within me,
Christ behind me,
Christ before me,
Christ beside me,
Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ in quiet,
Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger

Next a beautiful poem reflection that has been widely shared – originally published on Facebook on March 11, by Lynn Ungar a minister in California.

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world

different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.
(Lynn Ungar, Permission applied for)

The Anglican chaplain at All Saints Marseilles, Revd James Johnston, sent Clare this poem, written (a week ago!) by a Franciscan friar who is a friend of his:

Yes there is fear.
Yes there is isolation.
Yes there is panic buying.
Yes there is sickness.
Yes there is even death.
But,
They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
You can hear the birds again.
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
The sky is no longer thick with fumes
But blue and grey and clear.
They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.
They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
Today a young woman I know
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighbourhood

So that the elders may have someone to call on.
Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.
(Father Richard Hendrick, OFM)

In the last few months, Clare has been working with others to produce a Rule of Life, which was developed at the request of our Bishop in Europe. Its basic form is very short and simply suggests that a Rule of Life for Christians should encourage us in these four ways:

- * Knowing God
- * Growing in Christ
- * Building Community
- * Living Beyond Ourselves

These themes lead us on to the questions we might wish to ask ourselves in our present situation :

- * How can the isolation of many of us in this wilderness season of Lent encourage us to deepen our knowledge of God?
- * Does our present experience enable us to 'grow in Christ' by enabling us to tread a bit more deeply along the way of the cross?

* What does it mean for us to build community with our fellow Christians in these days, in which physical meeting is much more difficult, and services of corporate worship are not possible ?

* And does this virus teach us something about 'living beyond ourselves' in contexts in which we are being asked to modify our behaviour not simply (or perhaps even mainly) for our own sakes, but for the sake of the wider community and our fellow citizens?

Clare and Alan have been working with colleagues and friends at Holy Trinity Geneva over the last few days to prepare worship which will happen by 'Zoom' this coming Sunday (see below for details as to how to connect if you want to). The coming Sunday is of course Mothering Sunday – and our thoughts are turning to Mary as mother of Jesus. There is a powerful statue of Mary called 'the Walking Madonna' in the grounds of Salisbury Cathedral (see below). This is part of the sermon which will be 'preached' on Sunday, and which takes that statue as its starting point:

'... Our Gospel readings have shown us Mary in the Temple; and Mary at the Cross; but perhaps there is a third Mary, elusive but real. That is the Mary who ponders. Who thinks things out in the quiet of her heart. Both Clare and I love the statue, "the Walking Madonna" by Elizabeth Frink which stands outside Salisbury Cathedral. I say "stands" but it really feels like a statue in motion, if that is possible. Mary strides away from the Cathedral, wrapped in her own thoughts. Perhaps she has had enough of "churchiness" and is setting her feet towards the market place, towards our common humanity; or perhaps she carries with her the spirit of worship from the holy place that stands behind her. But for us, now, I think she is revealed as "the self-isolating Mother of God." She comes to us in this time of the virus, with her message, "learn from me to be yourself in God's presence; then you will come to know, like me, how to be *by yourself*." For the Mary described by Luke – who according to Orthodox tradition was the first to paint an icon of Mary – is one who knows how to be alone, and to ponder:

* but Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart (*Luke 2.19*)

* But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart (*Luke 2.51*).

In her aloneness – it seems that Joseph left her a widow at an early age – she did not diminish, but grew in faith, hope and love, showing us the way; the way to see and to endure.



Some links to digital worship (Anglican- Episcopal parishes in Geneva and C of E Diocese in Europe)

Holy Trinity Geneva – worship by ‘Zoom’ on Sunday 22 March at 10.30. Access by

<https://zoom.us/j/864442942>

Revd Louis Darrant, Costa Azahar, is offering -E[morning and evening prayer online each day – access via his facebook page ‘Louis Darrant’.

All Saints Rome, will be offering an online service on Sunday 22 March available via

<https://bobsprospect.blogspot.com/2020/03/mass-in-tin-from-all-saints-anglican.html#more>

Emmanuel Church Geneva is live-streaming both Sunday and weekday services. Go to

www.emmanuel.ch for details of how to connect.