

St. Ninian's Parish Church

Sunday 10th May 2020

John 14: 1 - 14

'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places,'¹ said Jesus in our Gospel reading this morning.

Is there anyone today who does not know what a house or a dwelling place is like? Even those who would otherwise sleep on the street, but who, over the past couple of months have been given a bed in a hotel, know at least a little about living in a dwelling place.

'If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you,' said Jesus. For many, those with time on their hands, their house and dwelling place may be looking particularly well prepared – maybe not by Jesus, but by our own fair hands. How tidy is your home? How clean is your oven? If you think you have reached the bottom of the list of things that need done then the consumer magazine Which this month gives good advice on how to clean your washing machine.

We all know what a dwelling place is like, and we all know what it means to live in a house. Confined to home, we are all in this together. But, not quite of course. Not everyone is having the same experiencing of the 'Stay at Home' advice. A large house, a garden, one child, all of which I enjoy, is not the same experience as a small flat, no garden, and three children.

While some people might be appreciating that realisation that the person they chose to marry is not the same person as they would choose to spend all day every day with, others are living with no one but themselves, and days go by with little human contact. While one the one hand the courts are already busy with cases of domestic violence, we can also expect the maternity wards to be busy by the end of the year. There are those who, being older, find spending days at home alone locked down not so different from normal life, and there are those in their teens and twenties whose lives were all about social interaction and who are now finding being house-bound with their parents a very special kind of endurance test.

'In my Father's house there are my dwelling places...' There most certainly are. We are all in the house, at home, but the places we are inhabiting at this time are many and varied. There is a sense that we are together as one country, one city, enduring the one crisis, but we are also separate and isolated having to cope with our very own particular situation.

From where will our salvation come? It will come from our collective action; the Government could not be clearer about that. It will come from how each of us applies ourselves to the crisis that we all share. Salvation will come through how we cope and what we do together. But, salvation will also come through how we cope and what we do in our own individual, unique context and situation. One crisis, many experiences, but only love can unite us all.

'I am the way, and the truth, and the life...',² said Jesus. There is a way to salvation, and the Government is working on it for all of us. There is a truth to our salvation, there are things we should all do and things we should all not do. There is a life in our salvation, we will all live differently in the future. But, make no mistake we will experience that way, which the Government lays down; that truth, which we should all do; and that life that we will all live, differently. The way, the truth and the life will be clear, but it will not be the same for all of us.

¹ John 14: 2

² John 14: 6

When it comes to understanding life, we will learn a lot from what is going on now, and one thing the pandemic will teach us is that we all experience the things that we share differently. When it comes to understanding faith, Jesus' words teach us that there may be just one God, one way, one truth, one life, in one heavenly home, but there are many dwelling places in that heavenly home, many different ways of experiencing what it is, what it looks like, what it feels like. Not everyone lives like us, worships like us or believes what we do.

'No one comes to the Father except by me...' said Jesus. If Jesus wanted to emphasise to his disciples both the diversity and the unity of his Father's house, he also reminded them that these two things are held together in him, in his love. We all experience the diversity of the one God, but only love can unite us all.

This is a lesson Jesus wanted to teach his followers. It is a lesson that we are learning from our current situation. It is also a lesson that Christian Aid wants us to appreciate about our world.

In this one world, there are many dwelling places. We all live on the same small planet, this one tiny, pale, blue dot in a vast universe, but we do not all experience this world in the same way.

That is certainly true of Covid-19. I am delighted that St. Ninian's has already made a donation to help Christian Aid's Covid-19 emergency appeal. After all it is one thing to live isolated under lock down in order to be protected from infection, but with a supermarket delivery just a click of a mouse away. It is quite another to live in a refugee camp or a slum, cheek-by-jowl with everyone else with no hope of ever buying a bar of soap to wash your hands with, and no running water even if you could.

It is a terrible thing to lose a job or to be not working, as thankful as we might be for the help of others or the support of the Government. It is quite another to have no work, no income, no savings, and a government with no money to help.

It is one thing to experience a pandemic with the support of a modern national health service, it is quite another to experience it with a health service that's definition of modern is 50 years old.

Support Christian Aid, and in love support the world's poorest people. As Christian Aid says, Coronavirus impacts us all, but love unites us all. We are all living with Covid-19, but we all experience it differently. The way we overcome our differences is through our love for each other.

But, that's not all Christian Aid wants us to do. We might ask; how did we get here, in need of salvation from a pandemic? Jesus' disciples too might ask him; how did we get here, in need of salvation from a God who has come to earth to live with us? How did we get here? We weren't listening to the those who warned us, the prophets and the epidemiologists, and so we weren't prepared. Because we weren't prepared Jesus needed to prepare a place for us.

So, perhaps, now is a time for us to think again about climate change. Before the outbreak of the pandemic Christian Aid's focus for this week was going to be on climate change and the affect that it is having on the world's poorest people. Now, quite rightly, it is focusing on helping people through the current crisis. But, the two are not unconnected.

For example, it is estimated that the global economic shut down will reduce emissions that contribute to climate change by five percent. That global economic shutdown has changed people's lives, but it has made a difference to the environment. The problem is, that if we want to meet the Paris Climate Agreement to limit the average global temperature to 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels, then we need to reduce emissions by 6.5%, not 5%, and we need to do it not just once, but every single year.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a crisis we were unprepared for. Christian Aid wants us to take action now so that we are not unprepared for the next crisis, Climate Change. We all live on this one planet, in this one house, but there are many dwelling places here, and we all experience this one planet, this one house differently. Christian Aid is reminding us that despite our diversity, what unites us is love; love for God the creator; love for ourselves in our situations; and love for our neighbours who experience this planet in ways we don't have to.

'Do not let your hearts be troubled,'³ said Jesus. We are all facing the same crises; Covid-19, climate change. But, there is salvation for us all, in all our diversity, if we believe that the way, the truth and the life unites us all in love when we care for each, recognising that our experiences are all different, that we live in different dwelling places, under different roofs, in different countries, under different conditions.

³ John 14: 1