

Thought for the Month

May 2020

Hard Times and Easter

We live in strange times and what was normal is no longer and what was abnormal seems to be becoming more normal. So, I was musing about 1) what the new normal might be, 2) what we might learn from this time of isolation and 3) how we might shape our new normal to be different and better than the old normal?

1). I guess I am not alone when I think it would be good to get back to normal, but most pundits seem to reckon that things will never quite be the same again. There has been talk that church will be more electronic and virtual in the future. Maybe our movements, at least globally, will be more restricted. Perhaps the vulnerable (and elderly!) will be forced to be more shielded. Will more people realise the benefits of working from home and so less travel to and from work? Will we phone/skype/face time more and visit people face to face less? Will we have to pay more tax to recover from this pandemic and ensure that our essential services are better provisioned for the future? Well of course this is all guess work but maybe, at least, we should not expect to get back to normal, but to look forward to a sort of new normal.

2). What has been good about the recent weeks? Well there seems to have been a greater consideration for the needs of others, especially neighbours. There has been a greater appreciation of the N.H.S. and Care Workers alongside other key workers, let's hope it amounts to more than a weekly clap on a Thursday evening! Air pollution has been a lot less and climate change seems to have slowed – some would say that the crisis of climate change is greater than the threat from the Corona virus! There has been a greater appreciation of meeting with family, friends and neighbours; sometimes we only realise how precious things are when they are no longer there, like going to church and meeting people face to face.

What has been not so good about these recent weeks? It's hard to be isolated from family and friends. It seems so rude to cross the road when we see somebody approaching. It's hard not to go out when we want to, especially for those with no garden or who live in apartments in busy cities. In normal times such regulations that we are under at the moment would feel like we were moving towards a Police State, eroding civil liberties and human rights, I'm sure we can all see the necessity for such actions at the moment but it

would be very worrying if such regulations became a new norm. I am sure you could add to the list.

3). So, if a new normal is round the corner, what might we do as Christians to shape that new normal? Well it strikes me that Easter gives us a clue. Jesus himself was not normal, he challenged the normality of his day with its hypocrisy, its concern with religious detail and lack of compassion, its concern with status and wealth and lack of concern for the poor – just look at the sermon on the mount Matthew 5. So, for Jesus and for Christians down through the ages, getting back to normal has never been an option. At Easter, in the light of the resurrection, we always look forward to a new way of living, which Jesus inaugurated and which we also look forward to every time we say “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” So, it seems to me that the new normal should have a real concern for God’s creation and for all God’s people, a move away from exploitation of resources and labour; perhaps even a new way of doing economics. The new normal should have a real concern for human relationships, for moving away from a blame culture to a culture which recognises human failure and frailty and then encourages the good and the compassion which is in every person. In short, the new normal for me, is about trying to follow Jesus, to love God and to love our neighbours and to live in faith and hope and love.

Stay safe? Yes. But in the new dispensation perhaps we will have to take risks too.

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