

OUR SUFFERING

I've been thinking a lot about covenant. Probably something to do with all those brightly coloured rainbows around! Symbols of shared joy and hope, helping to lift our virus weary spirits.

The rainbow is also a biblical sign. A sign of God's love and continued care. However, in the face of suffering, loss and fear, it is all too easy to wonder where God is. To doubt his love and his care.

The 'problem of suffering' has been a very real stumbling block for many generations. Generations of both believers and non-believers. And the questions suffering raises will I'm sure will be with us for many more generations to come!

Suffering doesn't come with a list of helpful answers, with easy solutions or responses. That is, after all, part of the suffering! There are wonderings, and sometimes there are also perplexing silences from God. And then inevitably there can come doubts, doubts that arise on the back of unanswered questions.

And yet!

The rainbow that reaches right across the skies is a symbol that has the ability to draw our attention upwards. Up and away from the events of our present circumstances to shine as a beacon of hope that there is something, someone, who is committed to us.

The rainbow can be a vivid reminder that roots us back into the truth of God's loving commitment and his covenant, to never leave us; to never forget about us. To always be with us, before, during, and also post, sorrow and suffering.

We need only to look back a couple of months, and remind ourselves of the Easter story, to see how deeply God is committed to sharing in our suffering. God didn't just create a rainbow in the sky to stretch out across the heavens. He chose also to stretch out his physical hands and suffer the depths of pain personally, embracing us in his sacrifice of love. But I don't think this came easily to Jesus, after all, he had laid aside his divinity to share in our humanity. Jesus asked many questions in prayer, unafraid to wrestle with God the Father!

He asked twice in the garden of Gethsemane if his cup of suffering could be taken from him. He, like us, would rather not suffer. He, like us, questioned why. As he wondered where God was, in the depths of his pain, crying out 'My God my God why have you forsaken me?'

Like for so many of us, it would seem that Father God chose, at that time to be silent, right at the point at which Jesus's suffering was most acute. Unlike the time when Jesus was baptised, there was no voice affirming and encouraging Jesus. There was no dove to show his presence. And yet into the silence, of his lonely sojourn, Jesus does something remarkable, he shows us the depths of his trust; and the true nature of what unconditional love is.

Jesus does not receive the answer to his question. He does not receive the deleting or ending of his suffering. And yet, into the mysterious silence, he chooses to trust the mystery that is God. As he says, 'Into your hands I commit my spirit.'

Jesus showed us an alternative way to respond to suffering and silence. That instead of closing down towards God, there is another way. A way that turns us towards God, that teaches a letting go of our own hopeful desire for ease, and instead trusts our mysterious God, with our own, very real mysteries.

However, when we look again at Jesus and see what happens after committing his spirit to God. We must note, It is not all over! You've got it! Yet more tragedy! No grand immediate relief. But rather yet more silence, and even more darkness.

There is often a wait before the beginnings of hope. A waiting period before the beginnings of transformation ... and eventual resurrection.

Our present sufferings and darkness are hugely felt, in communities and countries around the globe. It is very real and very tangibly felt. Just as were the sufferings of Jesus. But, I truly believe that one day in the mysteries of time and in God's mysterious way there will be transformation, and indeed resurrection. This is, after all, God's covenantal way. Redeeming, rescuing and reviving his people! May we dare to trust in God's often silent, but always covenantal, love!

Blessings,
Rev. Susie Bishop

LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF SWINDON

Dear friends, colleagues and sisters and brothers in Christ

I have been overwhelmed by the cards, letters and messages of support which I have received, and continue to receive, since my accident in January. It has made such a difference, knowing your care, kindness and prayers for me and for Liz.

My latest appointment and x-rays took place at the end of April. Yesterday I received a letter from the orthopaedic surgeon who saw me, confirming that I am now fit enough to return to ministerial duties. As some of you will know, I have been assisting the Bishop's Staff Team since the Covid-19 crisis took hold but have still been in rehabilitation mode.

The latest x-rays showed that my femur is in its correct anatomical position but that the bone is likely to take another three months or so for the break to fully heal. The surgeon said this is to be expected, and was very pleased with how I had recovered in terms of wound healing and movement, though I will need to continue working on the latter for a while yet.

There will be some further news from me in relation to Christian Aid Week, and also some reflections which I am putting together following my long confinement. This will be coming your way soon and I hope will be of help to you and others.

I would have loved to have written more personally to each of you and your congregations but trust that what I have written here will convey how grateful I am to each of you. I feel very blessed to serve you as a Bishop.

In these days of journeying where the route and endings are still so unclear, perhaps these images from Israel's history will strengthen our faith and confidence:

May the One who led the people by the cloud in the daytime and pillar of fire by night, continue to guide and go before us in these days of change and uncertainty.

Yours, as ever

+Lee

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WARMLEY WARBLINGS

We remember in our regular prayers, those of our church family who have been unwell, thinking in particular of Mervyn and Lil Little, Martin Pullin, Margaret Hill, Kath Palmer, Roger and Pauline Newman, we wish them all well.

As usual, we remember all of our friends who are in residential or nursing homes at this time, Grace Watson, Eileen Penny, John Short, Marjory Cox and Rita Jones.

We send our love and best wishes to John Eames as he recovers from surgery recently and we remember in our prayers his wife Chris as she cares for him at home. Also we send our best wishes to Muriel Allen who had treatment at Bristol Eye Hospital recently.

Although there has clearly been some progress in the battles against the coronavirus in terms of the death rate falling and less people being infected or needing hospital treatment, many people are still struggling with the effects of self-isolation or the curtailment of their normal activities. On a positive note though, it is really encouraging to hear how many in our church family are either receiving or offering support in so many ways. This comes in the form of how help with shopping or just as important regular contact by phone or social media, to those living alone, this contact is so important and so very much appreciated. For those of us fortunate enough to have access to the internet the online services on Wednesday and Sunday have been really appreciated and have meant so much while our church has been closed, our thanks to Jeremy and everyone else who has been involved.

Our church magazine will again been published online in June and is available on our website at www.warmleychurch.org I look forward very much to be able to provide it in print at some time later this year,

Brian Draper

BIBLE QUESTIONS QUIZ

1. The Ten Commandments were written on Tablets of ----?
2. Who was the first Woman?
3. What is the longest word in the Bible?
4. She was the sister of Moses and daughter of Amram?
5. How many books does the Old Testament comprise of?
6. How many books does the New Testament comprise of?
7. How many chapters are in the Old Testament?
8. Who wished he could return to eternal darkness and cursed the day he was born?
9. What is the English meaning of the Greek word "gospel"?
10. What is the shortest chapter in the Bible?
11. What is the longest chapter in the Bible?
12. What is the smallest book in the Old Testament?
13. Name the twelve Apostles.
14. Name the four gospels in the New Testament.
15. What is the shortest verse in the Bible?
16. How many verses are there in the Bible?
17. What is another name for the New Testament book of prophecy?
18. Which gospel writer was the first of the Evangelists and wrote the gospel in Hebrew?
19. Which apostle was given the authority to cast out unclean spirits and to heal the sick?
20. Which bible book says, "The wages of sin is death"?

The answers will be printed in the July edition of the magazine

MAY CROSSWORD ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1, Stop. 3, Call upon. 9, Regular. 10, Octet. 11, Inner. 12, Hudson. 14, Holy Communion. 17, Myself. 19, See to. 22, About. 23, Iterate. 24, Monarchy. 25, Stet.

DOWN: 1, Straight. 2, Organ. 4, Abraham's faith. 5, Lloyd. 6, Puteoli. 7, Note. 8, Cleric. 13, Innocent. 15, Lay down. 16, Ussher. 18, Enter. 20, Enact. 21, Balm.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR HEALTH?

Having a religious faith may well make you feel better about your health, according to recent government figures.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published data linking religious belief and health in an effort to "understand the circumstances of people of different religious identities."

It found that 66 per cent of Muslims, 68 per cent of Christians, 69 per cent of Sikhs, 71 per cent of Buddhists, 72 per cent of Hindus and 77 per cent of Jews were satisfied with their health between 2016 and 2018.

In contrast, only 64 per cent of non-religious people reported being satisfied with their health during that time.

Michael Wakelin, chair of the Religious Media Centre, said: "I guess this has something to do with an attitude of gratitude. If you are of the opinion that God loves you and He created you, you are more likely to be grateful for what you have.

"Also, if you have a faith you are more likely to be hopeful for a better future, so that even if things are a bit tough now, they will improve in God's time."

ALL IN THE MONTH OF JUNE

It was:

250 years ago, on 11th June 1770 that English explorer Captain James Cook discovered the Great Barrier Reef off Australia when his ship ran aground on it and was severely damaged.

200 years ago, on 19th June 1820 that Joseph Banks, British naturalist, died. He was President of the Royal Society for 41 years, developed the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, into one of the world's leading botanical gardens.

150 years ago, on 9th June 1870 that Charles Dickens, British novelist, died. His books include *The Pickwick Papers*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*.

100 years ago, on 11th June 1920 that the Colony of Kenya was established. It was previously known as British East Africa. It gained its independence as Kenya in 1963.

80 years ago, June 1940, was a dramatic month in World War II. Main points include:

3rd The German Luftwaffe bombed Paris.

4th The evacuation of Allied forces from Dunkirk was completed.

Winston Churchill gave his 'We shall fight them on the beaches' speech.

5th The Battle of France began.

10th Italy declared war on France and Britain.

Canada declared war on Italy.

The North African Campaign (Desert War) began.

11th The siege of Malta began.

14th German forces entered Paris.

17th French government minister Charles de Gaulle (later President of France) relocated to Britain.

18th Winston Churchill gave his 'Finest Hour' speech.

22nd France surrendered to Germany.

30th Germany invaded the Channel Islands.

75 years ago, on 22nd June 1945 that the Battle of Okinawa ended after 82 days. This battle saw the highest number of casualties in the

Pacific Theatre of the war, with more than 12,000 Allies, 110,000 Japanese forces and 140,000 civilians killed.

70 years ago, on 3rd June 1950 that the first successful ascent of Annapurna in the Himalayas, was accomplished by a French expedition led by Maurice Herzog. This was the first successful ascent of a mountain over 8,000 metres. Annapurna is the 10th highest mountain in the world.

65 years ago, on 11th June 1955 that the Le Mans disaster took place when a car span off the track during the Le Mans 24 Hour race in France. The driver, Pierre Levegh, and 83 spectators were killed and over 100 injured. It was the greatest loss of life in the history of motorsport.

60 years ago, on 16th June 1960 that Alfred Hitchcock's suspense film *Psycho* was released.

50 years ago, on 29th June 1970 that following the Vietnam War, US troops were withdrawn from Cambodia.

40 years ago, on 12th June 1980 that Billy Butlin, British holiday camp entrepreneur, died.

30 years ago, on 22nd June 1990 that Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, was dismantled. It remained an official crossing point between East and West Germany until re-unification in October. The guard house is now on display in a museum.

20 years ago, on 10th June 2000 that the Millennium Bridge in London opened. It closed again two days later because it swayed uncomfortably when people walked in step. It reopened in Feb 2002 after changes were made.

10 years ago, on 15th June 2010 that the Saville Report, an inquiry into Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland in 1972, was published. It determined that British paratroopers had fired the first shot, without warning. Prime Minister David Cameron apologised on behalf of the British Government.

JESUS CALMING THE STORM OF COVID-19

The BBC 'Today' programme that was broadcast on Good Friday included an interview with Hylton Murray-Philipson, a survivor of Covid-19. He had been on a ventilator in Leicester Royal Infirmary, "reduced to the state of a baby".

The programme presenter, Nick Robinson, invited him to describe memories of his time in intensive care. When he said one of the images he had, in a moment of great distress and struggle, was of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and he would like to think this was Jesus coming to him and helping *him* in his hour of need, Robinson suggested this was partly because of the powerful drugs he had been given, "which play tricks with the mind".

Later, Robinson apologised and said he didn't mean to demean anyone's faith. But what he had said also betrayed ignorance. While it is true that pain-killing drugs can cause hallucinations, these side-effects are rarely pleasant. It is not uncommon for patients to become agitated, anxious, confused and even prone to violence. Their physical pain will have been reduced, but that may have been at the necessary cost of mental disturbance; the overriding experience being more like that of a storm, than of a sea being calmed.

Back in the 1960s, it became fashionable for some groups to promote the use of illicit drugs because of the temporary sensations they induced. John Lennon of the Beatles said he had "such an overwhelming feeling of well-being, that there was a God, and I could see him in every blade of grass. It was like gaining hundreds of years of experience in 12 hours."

In his new book, 'Morality – Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times', Rabbi Jonathan Sacks chronicles the devastating long-term effects of leisure drugs. He includes cannabis, which he calls a 'gateway drug', because most of those who become serious addicts later, began with it.

So what was it that Hylton Murray-Philipson actually experienced, when he was at death's door in that hospital intensive care unit? He knew the biblical story of seasoned fishermen, fearful of their lives because a sudden squall threatened to swamp their boat. Did he recall their alarm because Jesus, asleep in the stern, appeared to be unconcerned at the very moment when divine assistance was most needed? Did not his coronavirus-induced distress match theirs?

The Gospels relate that Jesus woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. Is that what Hylton experienced, too? He says it was.

BLESSED ARE THE TRUTH TELLERS (DURING THE PANDEMIC)

ITV News journalist and presenter Julie Etchingam, a practising Christian, has defended the role played by journalists during the Coronavirus pandemic. She told the Christians in Media website, “Reporters are coming in for a lot of flack for the questions they are asking government. But what else are we for? We all get that this is a crisis like no other; that few in government have ever had to navigate such a challenge.

“But, if we’re still attempting to function as a democracy in the face of this, then scrutiny is clearly crucial. Many in our frontline services and the wider public are demanding answers. We are there on their behalf. We don’t always get it right. This isn’t a moment to trip people up, but urgently to get to the truth.”

As a Christian who has worked in communications for around 50 years, I strongly support Julie Etchingam’s view. Now is the time for truth and accuracy to be at the centre of all our communications.

So, yes we need to be praying for and supporting the front-line health service staff, the public health experts, the scientists researching vaccines to combat the virus, and the key workers keeping our societies running.

But we also need to be praying for and supporting the men and women working in and with the media to publish, upload, broadcast and distribute the most accurate information, without spin or distortion. So here is a prayer for the media in these challenging days.

*Loving God,
We pray for everyone working in and with media in these challenging times.
Encourage all who seek to explain and interpret the fast-changing world
around us.
Embolden the truth-tellers, truth-seekers and fact-checkers.
Promote coverage that builds our shared humanity and where everyone has a
voice.
Bring clarity where there is confusion
Bring knowledge where there is speculation
Bring wisdom and insight when the way ahead seems unclear.
And bring us all to a knowledge of truth that sets us free, and helps keep us
safe.
In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

21st JUNE, FATHERS' DAY. A TIME TO CELEBRATE MALE ROLE MODELS

In the UK, USA and Canada, the third Sunday in June is Father's Day. It's usually a good time for sons and daughters to take their father to his favourite restaurant, or to watch a favoured sport, or whatever else he enjoys doing.

How will you celebrate it this year? If your own father cannot be with you, how about a Zoom meeting?

How do these special days ever get started, anyway? Well, Father's Day began because way back in 1909 there was a woman in Spokane, Washington, named Sonora Louise Smart Dodd. That year she heard a church sermon about the merits of setting aside a day to honour one's mother. Mother's Day was just beginning to gather widespread attention in the United States at this time. But Sonora Louise Smart Dodd knew that it was her father who had selflessly raised herself and her five siblings by himself after their mother had died in childbirth. So the sermon on mothers gave Sonora Louise the idea to petition for a day to honour fathers, and in particular, her own father, William Jackson Smart.

Sonora Louise soon set about planning the first Father's Day celebration in Spokane in 1910. With support from the Spokane Ministerial Association and the YMCA, her efforts paid off, and a 'Father's Day' was appointed. Sonora Louise had wanted Father's Day to be on the first Sunday in June (since that was her father's birthday), but the city council didn't have time to approve it until later in the month. And so on June 19th, 1910, the first Father's Day was celebrated in Spokane.

Gradually, other people in other cities caught on and started celebrating their fathers, too. The rose was selected as the official Father's Day flower. Some people began to wear a white rose to honour a father who was dead, and a red one to honour a father who was living. Finally, in 1972, President Richard Nixon signed a presidential proclamation declaring the third Sunday of June as Father's Day – a permanent, national holiday.

LOOKING FOR HOPE AMONGST THE CLUTTER

In this strange locked down season, because of the coronavirus pandemic, I've noticed a change in the type of pictures posted on social media. In place of the look-here-at-me selfies are snapshots of buds opening to display the colours of spring.

Such hopeful images counterbalance gloomy statistics in the news media. There are also more memory pictures – this is what I was doing on this day years ago with people I love – I wish we could be together now.

While we're not allowed to make the kind of memories depicted in those pictures, we find comfort in memories we already have.

One thing I've done with this unexpected free time is to organize printed photographs into albums. The photos and the albums have been there for a while, waiting for me to get a round tuit. You remember the old joke? Imagine people finding their round tuits in cupboards and drawers all over the country. How would you use yours? To sow seeds that had not been planted? To read the book gathering dust on a shelf?

What else needs tackling? Now may be an ideal time to face the daunting corner where clutter lurks. Daunting because of what you may disturb among age-old piles of unsorted belongings. Looking squarely at the past may be an unwelcome prospect. It makes us face uncomfortable questions. Projects we may never finish, equipment we cannot use any more, objects of attachment from people we've lost. Isn't that like what we're doing as a nation in these unprecedented times? Issues we have been avoiding are suddenly highlighted through unfamiliar circumstances.

There is much talk about how we're looking forward to getting back to normal on the other side of this international crisis. Some people say they hope things will have changed, that normal will not look the same as it used to, because we have learned valuable lessons about what really matters in life. It's up to us whether or not we rise to the challenge, to reorganize society more fairly, to care more for the environment.

By myself I cannot change the world, but I'm determined to look after the little space that is in my care, not to let it be overwhelmed with needless clutter. Be brave. Use this negative time to make a positive change in your small corner. If you choose to sort it out, I guarantee that amidst all the mess you will find at least one thing, however small, to bring you joy – even if it's just a clean and tidy corner.

11th JUNE, St. BARNABAS PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY COMPANION

Would you have liked to go to Cyprus on holiday this year? If so, spare a thought for the Cypriot who played such a key role in the New Testament.

He was Joseph, a Jewish Cypriot and a Levite, who is first mentioned in Acts 4:36, when the Early Church was sharing a communal lifestyle. Joseph sold a field and gave the money to the apostles. His support so touched them that they gave him the nickname of Barnabas, 'Son of Encouragement'.

Barnabas has two great claims to fame. Firstly, it was Barnabas who made the journey to go and fetch the converted Paul out of Tarsus, and persuade him to go with him to Antioch, where there were many new believers with no one to help them. For a year the two men ministered there, establishing a church. It was here that the believers were first called Christians.

It was also in Antioch (Acts 13) that the Holy Spirit led the church to 'set aside' Barnabas and Paul, and to send them out on the church's first ever 'missionary journey'. The Bible tells us that they went to Cyprus, and then travelled throughout the island. It was at Lystra that the locals mistook Barnabas for Zeus and Paul for Hermes, much to their dismay.

Much later, back in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul decided to part company. While Paul travelled on to Syria, Barnabas did what he could do best: return to Cyprus and continue to evangelise it. So, if you go to Cyprus and see churches, remember that Christianity on that beautiful island goes right back to Acts 13, when Barnabas and Paul first arrived.

In England there are 13 ancient church dedications and not a few modern ones. Barnabas the generous, the encourager, the apostle who loved his own people – no wonder he should be remembered with love.

7th JUNE, TRINITY SUNDAY CELEBRATING OUR GOD WHO IS THREE IN ONE PERSONS

Trying to explain the doctrine of the Trinity has kept many a theologian busy down the centuries. One helpful picture is to imagine the sun shining in the sky. The sun itself – way out there in space, and unapproachable in its fiery majesty – is the Father. The light that flows from it, which gives us life and illuminates all our lives, is the Son. The heat that flows from it, and which gives us all the energy to move and grow, is the Holy Spirit. You cannot have the sun without its light and its heat. The light and the heat are from the sun, are *of* the sun, and yet are also distinct in themselves, with their own roles to play.

The Bible makes clear that God is One God, who is disclosed in three persons: Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit. For example: Deuteronomy 6:4: 'Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one.' Isaiah 45:22: 'Turn to me and be saved... for I am God, and there is no other.'

Genesis 1:1-2: 'In the beginning God created.... and the Spirit of God was hovering...'

Judges 14:6: 'The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power...'

John 1:1-3: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.'

Luke 24:49 actually manages to squeeze the whole Trinity into one sentence. Jesus tells His disciples: 'I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power (the Holy Spirit) from on high.'

In other words, the sun eternally gives off light and heat, and whenever we turn to its brilliant light, we find that the warmth and life there as well.

A LITTLE HUMOUR

How to make your wife more efficient

An efficiency expert was delivering a seminar on time management for a company's junior executives. He concluded the session with a disclaimer: "But whatever you do, do NOT attempt these task-organising tips at home," he said.

When he was asked why not, he explained: "Well, I did a study of my wife's routine of fixing breakfast. I noticed she made a lot of trips between the refrigerator and the stove, the table and the cabinets, each time carrying only one item. So, I told her: 'Darling you are making too many trips back and forth carrying one item at a time. If you would only try carrying several things at once you would be much more efficient.'" He paused.

"Did that save time?" one of the executives asked.

"Actually, yes," the expert answered, "It used to take her 15 minutes to fix my breakfast. Now I get my own in seven minutes."

Lipstick

Every morning, a little girl would go in the bathroom to watch her mother as she was putting on her makeup to go to work. But during coronavirus, the mother stopped bothering with makeup, much to her daughter's confusion. "Mummy," she cried early on in the lockdown: "Come back! You forgot to kiss the toilet paper goodbye!"

Not a bride

"Something's wrong with me," sighed a young lady after a wedding. "I've been a bridesmaid twice, I even caught the bouquet, too; but I'm still single."
"Next time," advised her grandmother, "don't reach for the flowers; reach for the best man."

Polite church

"The congregation was wonderful," said the minister after the Zoom service. "They were so polite that they even covered their mouths when they yawned."