

One of the most difficult things I've found during this pandemic is to keep positive and happy when confronted with uncertainty and change. During the last year our familiar landmarks and pointers have been obliterated: church attendance in person not allowed; holidays and meetings have been cancelled; almost everything I thought I held dear was deemed 'inessential'. So where does that leave my faith, my sense of purpose, my DIRECTION? I came across a Lenten Study Booklet by Paula Gooder in which she takes various items needed on a physical journey and uses them to discuss SPIRITUAL ESSENTIALS FOR REAL LIFE. The first one is a compass.

*Prayer:*

Loving God, be present with us, we pray. Open our minds to hear your word, our hearts to meet you afresh and your lives to follow your will. Amen

*Reading:*

John 14: 1 – 7 (as re-translated by Paula Gooder, to help hear the familiar passage afresh)

'Don't let your heart be in turmoil. Trust in God and trust in me. There are many rooms in my father's house. If not, would I have said to you that I'm going on a journey to prepare a place for you? I will come again and take you along with me, so that you are also where I am. And where I'm going you know the way.'

Thomas said to him: 'Lord, but we don't know where you are going so how CAN we know the way?'

Jesus said to him: 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my father and from now on, you do know him and you have seen him'.

*Reflection:*

Jesus makes a contrast between 'turmoil' (being shaken around or buffeted about) and 'trust' where you have firm foundations. Thomas, and most of us, want to know where we are going tomorrow, or next week (Will schools go back? Will the pandemic end? Will we ever see our elderly relatives again? Can I book something for next summer? Am I allowed to chat to my friend over the garden fence? Or even: how can I keep up being a Christian on my own? What shape is my Christian ministry if I'm not allowed to meet others? And deeper questions still: why have so many good, innocent people died?)

Thomas is told that Jesus is the way to God and this is what shapes the direction of his life. I wonder whether this answer of Jesus actually helped Thomas. He was worried about a concrete direction, real-life answers to specific problems. Jesus answered with encouragement to look towards a spiritual direction. We too want specific answers, but we

are gently nudged to the realisation that, if we keep our faith in God through Jesus, we'll be going in the right direction. Jesus's compass will direct us, as well as Thomas, to God.

In some ways the pandemic has pared away a lot of unimportant things and left us to realise that we all have a personal responsibility to look to God as our direction in life.

We don't need to know where we are now, or even where we are going to, so long as we keep the eyes of our heart fixed on our compass, the one who is the way to God, the father.

O Jesus, I have promised

To serve thee to the end.

Be thou for ever near me,

My master and my friend.

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O guide me, call me, draw me

Uphold me to the end

O give me grace to follow

My saviour and my friend.

*Prayer:*

Lord, whenever I worry about what the future holds, I will acknowledge that my future is in your hands. Whenever I need to make a decision, I will turn to you for assurance and confidence that you are there, loving me.

I have many people and situations in my mind which need your intervention.-----

Take them, make me prepared to be your hands and words in your world.

In everything may your will be done

Amen

*(Ideas and quotations from 1) 'Lentwise: Spiritual Essentials for real Life' by Paula Gooder published by Church House Publishing 2008*

*2) O Jesus I have promised Rejoice and Sing 509 from verses 1 and 4)*