

A Letter from our Minister at Haddington West Church

27 March 2020

Dear brother / sister in Christ

I hope this finds you well as you quietly adhere to the measures the authorities have issued in order to deal with the virus outbreak, be it that you do so on your own or together with other members of your household. I greet you all with the peace and grace of Christ.

Being unable physically to gather or meet for some time and for reasons we are all aware of, I felt I wanted to put some thoughts on paper and share them with you in this way.

These are trying and testing times and it would only be natural if we reacted to it with worry and with anxious thoughts. The relative security of our lives which we have enjoyed and become accustomed to has made way to an uneasy state of threat and alarm. Used to having a hold on how to live our lives and spend our time, we are now in the grip of uncertainty and fear. If we needed reminding that we are frail, are but "like grass that withers", the outbreak has done that amply.

To us as Christians a way is open to combat worry and fear by putting the thing into its proper context. By doing this we eliminate from it the disconcerting element of surprise and we gain a degree of preparedness. The proper context is one that makes us see that actually it is part and parcel of our existence, it is 'normality'. "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.*" (1Pt.4, 12)

The things that cause us fear and worry – hardships, uncertainties, even sufferings – are not strange to God's plan of rescue and help and nor are they alien to God's love and goodness or incompatible with His will to save us. On the contrary!

But the key to this is not that these uncertainties, fears and sufferings are somehow good in themselves (we must seek to overcome them); no, the key to this is Christ Jesus, who himself experienced fear and suffered, more than any of us can ever know. And because he has, the goal, surpassing all we can imagine and bringing God's fulfilment of life, is to be in Christ and to be found in him who rose from the dead. Which is why when we must suffer we do so "for his sake". Our hardships are for his sake when they draw us to him so that our faith be deepened and we be shaped more into his image.

When we know this, in heart and mind, we can accept, can be patient, can even hear as Paul says: "Rejoice!" Christ is the key, and faith holds it.

Let us be confident then of God's faithful love and care in Christ and that it shall never cease. From our fears and troubles let us look to Him who will use them for our good (which in Christ stands all secured!). Let us bring everything to Him in prayer, thankful for all His mercies, seeking His help and that we may see it; let us pray for one another, for our community, for the affected, for the caring profession, for his protection. And let us take what comes as from His hand. May He fill us all "*with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding* (Phil.1, 9).

Lastly, something practical: On the airwaves we sometimes hear people discussing suggestions about what to do with the extra time the lock-down affords us. Can I suggest, next to finding ways of being helpful, we use some of it for explorations into God's Word, for prayer, for meditating on the unsearchable riches of Christ and how we can make him known?

Commending you all to the Good Shepherd, I pray for your safety and that of your loved ones and for *the peace which passes all understanding to guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Your minister and brother in Christ,

John