

Out of the blue

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There is quite a memorable scene in the movie 'Independence Day' when one morning people look up and see an unusual darkening in the skies, only to discover a gigantic flying saucer hung above the sky. Something which lay in people's imagination and fictional works appearing as an undeniable physical reality, defying any straightforward explanations. No one seemed to know how it came to be there, when it would move away or how it could be got rid of. The movie, of course in true Hollywood fashion has a long drawn battle with the alien invaders; with humanity winning in the end.

It doesn't take a big leap of imagination to see some similarity in the situation caused by the virus now - which hangs across the world like a large dark cloud. The world and its scientists are busily working to understand the virus, discover its weakness and fight it on all fronts; perhaps not in the Hollywood sense but in more realistic and practical ways.

When a situation of such magnitude occurs, the natural instinct is to range though history to see if mankind has faced similar situations in the past. Yes, there have been plagues, terrible earthquakes and long-drawn wars before, but the world has never been so connected as it is now. The horror of what happens in one part of the world is never far off from happening where we are. The virus which started in a remote corner of the world is now across our entire planet.

The feeling of frustration with this pandemic stretching now for several months could have some echoes (although in a much smaller way) of what people during the long stretching two worlds wars may have felt; things moving backwards and forward, and the increasing number of families grieving their loss. The fight against the virus is also a battle, and things which matter in any battle remain the same; discipline, rules and organisation - and above all remaining calm.

The normal hum of busy life before this pandemic had its own stresses no doubt, but there had been adequate outlets which helped a lot of people cope with that - such as going out for meals with friends or shopping with family or the normal worship/fellowship within the church. It is a well known fact that stress can affect people in many ways - some more and some less; bad temper and blaming the world at large are but common responses to it. The virus has already taken many lives but if it also starts gripping our long held trust and expectations of each other, and supportive fellowships; that's something to guard against.

Wars and crises have always ended, as will this too. A lot of people are praying for this to end - for human endeavour to be directed effectively towards a successful solution. Very often you see skies pouring rain where you stand, but then also in the distant horizon you can sometimes see a small clear patch of blue light. And if you remain patient, you might also see the slim blue streak slowly spreads more widely across the sky - and the rain stops. This cloud over the world too will give way to clear sky in time.

Reading through accounts of the generation which had witnessed the first world war, the Armistice day, when it came, was an occasion of great jubilation. In the streets across towns, market squares and in families, there was at first disbelief that it was actually all over - then an intense wave of relief across the continent that the guns had finally fallen silent.

It is also worth considering the question that when the pandemic ends, would we come with a slightly different perspective of life? Perhaps we may become more aware that things which we took for granted are not guaranteed, perhaps we may seek to treasure them more. Perhaps realise that for all our technological progress, how vulnerable our bodies remain.

We may perhaps also realise with awe that the creator of all that is seen and unseen, the one who lays down the manner of movement and behaviour of all living and non living things, promises to walk with us all the way:

'Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world'. (Matt 28:20).

And it is to our God in Christ that we look to carry us through this tumultuous period, and deliver us safely once again to the time of jubilation and joy when this virus ends its march.