

Beyond Separation

Our experience of the pandemic continues. Back in the spring when the sun shone and we all slowed down and stopped dashing about and there was less air pollution and gardens were tidier...we thought that some good was coming of this pandemic.

But when we realised that the deaths of elderly relatives in care homes weren't included in the daily count of lives lost...as though they didn't matter...

When we realised that those dying of Covid 19 were more often of black or Asian heritage...

When we realised that painted rainbows on windows and a clap on a Thursday evening didn't help NHS workers pay for their children school uniforms because their wages were so low...

When we experienced that moment when those we loved died, without us seeing them, or touching them, and we couldn't mourn them as we wished...

When we realised that the two nurses who cared for our Prime Minister when he had Covid 19 and was so ill and who he wanted to thank personally were immigrants to the UK

Then we knew the real cost of the pandemic is not about whether we can go to Spain on holiday, or hold a BBQ with friends, but rather the pandemic was holding up a light up to our lives, our decision making processes, onto the powerful and how they treated those who were not and the real question we discovered was in fact about who we are, and who we want to be, and whose life matters, and who never needs to ask that question because they can always be certain that their life will always matter because of the privilege of their whiteness, or their wealth, or their power.

So in this time of pandemic we have known separation and we have found some of the ways which connect us.

We now have and are familiar with zoom worship and meetings, coffee mornings, bible study, theological book clubs – all on zoom, the old fashioned telephone, a service sheet pushed through our door and this lead us beyond separation.

So we turn to Eularia Clark's painting *The Storm over the Lake*. The storm is a frightening one. The waves are huge, people are at a real risk of drowning and the fear on people's faces is vivid. Jesus, who was asleep wakes, and in this painting, is immersed in the water. His feet are wet. He is a source of light and hope and strength and there is no doubt he is with his friends in their time of hardship and he feels the storm as they do.

The point I want to offer you for reflection is this:

Some people were lonely before a pandemic came along

Some people's mental health was a perfect storm for them every day

Some people can't be sure if their life matters as much as others seem to

So, we must not fall into a trap of thinking zoom is the answer to everything. We must preach a gospel, and live lives, and be signs of the connectedness between each of us, and between us and God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ. This is beyond separation. If one single person is left to die as of no account, or of lesser importance, we all drown.

So this is why we are here, and this is our calling and our Methodist way of life and I deliberately call you to commit again to this way of life which emphasis that Christ died for all, that all can be saved and saved to the uttermost.

We are called to be signs of God's love and grace in our communities, to be sources of light and strength and hope for others, for every other, for all. We do this connected to one another and bound to God with a tie that cannot be broken.

In the words of Tim Rees's hymn

God is love: and he, enfolding
All the world in one embrace
With unfailing grasp is holding
Every child of every race
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod
Then they find that self same aching deep within the heart of God.

Therein lies our salvation. Thanks be to God.