

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

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by Liz Waumsley



Week 4 of lockdown, and counting...

Who, last Easter, could possibly have imagined this?

I feel very fortunate. I have a comfortable house, a garden – a lovely wooded space which owes everything to nature and very little to any work of mine, a studio to make paintings in, and the company of my son, Peter. I can see and talk to my sister (in Australia) and my son Andrew and his family (in Dubai) via Facetime and Skype. It's a bit like living in a luxurious bubble.

Then I read my newspaper and listen to the radio, and learn about the devastating daily total of deaths caused by Covid-19, the toll taken on those working for us in the NHS, in social care, and on transport, because of too little protection and too much exposure to this coronavirus. I compare my own comfortable bubble with the circumstances of others; in this country living in crowded homes with no gardens, and with green spaces like parks locked to them because the overwhelming numbers of families needing to take their children out for fresh air and exercise compromise social distancing; and in African countries, in India, in border refugee encampments where social distancing and isolation are impossible and the virus will take an astronomical number of lives.

Global catastrophes like this one are not experienced equally by all. We are not “all in it together”.

There have been catastrophic events throughout history when people have said afterwards – things must change. And things do change – for a while. During the smogs in London and other British cities, notably in 1952, 12,000 people died and the Clean Air Act was passed. But now we learn that 40,000 have died in recent years because of preventable air pollution. World War 1 was the “war to end all wars”, but the settlements were so far from final that there was World War 2. This country put a huge amount of

money and effort into making a land fit for heroes with decent housing for everyone, but now housing is a lottery where those with uncertain incomes miss out. We find it so hard to learn from the past, or to listen to those who can see further than we can. The Old Testament is full of stories about human nature, where people are warned that unless things change, an inevitable disaster will happen. Jeremiah warned of the coming of the Babylonians, intent on conquering all around them, but he was thrown into a pit! Scientists and researchers around the world have warned of the consequences of the runaway consumerism indulged in by the rich countries in terms of climate, environment, welfare of wild creatures and of people who live close to nature. They have mostly been seen as exaggerators, voices discordant to our ears. When government was confronted with the results of computer modelling done to understand how a new virus could behave if it was brought to the UK by air travellers, say a virus that had mutated within animals kept in captivity in close proximity and passed on to humans, as had happened before, the study was shelved, because to plan for such an infection which was transmitted in the way the model suggested, would be prohibitively expensive.

So will things change, and change for good, after this crisis is over? How do we imagine the world of 2030?

Reading my newspaper brings me to tears of despair, and then I turn the page and they turn into tears of hope and relief. I read about the nurses and doctors who treat dying patients with such compassion, and are so kind when they phone the family members who could not be there. You can see in TV interviews how all this is breaking their hearts. I read about groups of volunteers springing up because they worry about old and vulnerable people being on their own. I see a picture of a rainbow in a window with a small boy standing behind it doing a thumbs up. I see how my daughter in law in Dubai is managing to show the love and care which she has for her 7 year old pupils in her online lessons, together with a good dose of humour to make them laugh.

We have just taken part in very moving Good Friday and Easter Sunday services, with Easter Communion. The creativity and inspiration which is going into these audio services fills me with pride and gratitude that our church can do this for us all. The wonderful thing is that these services, and those prepared by other worshipping communities, reach far further than to our own congregations. There are thousands of people who do not normally come to church who are taking part. People want to be part of the

resurrection, the joy of new life and new hope. There is new life in the belief that in the power of the Holy Spirit we can follow Jesus – the Jesus who believed in people even while knowing that we are all too prone to close our eyes and ears to the suffering of others. If Jesus understood and forgave Judas, he can understand and forgive us, and support our stirring sense that a new order must come.

Have we allowed our own belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to be quenched, as we have been lulled into submission by political and commercial systems which claim to know better than we do what is good for us?

Maybe the lasting change will come when we find our own authentic voices and line up with those who are showing a different kind of leadership in this critical moment. Can we show courage and compassion and say, enough! Enough, to the way many people are marginalised and discounted; to the way care workers are under paid and undervalued and health workers at all levels are under resourced; to the way we expect to buy out of season fruit and vegetables in our supermarkets, and have goods delivered to our doors; to the way we book foreign holidays without considering the consequences; to the way we drive our polluting vehicles wherever we like; to the way we have sought to control rather than understand the natural world.

All these unthinking behaviours and appetites of ours have fed into making this current crisis. The wonderful truth is that there are already ways of buying and eating that support local businesses, there already exist ways of travelling and taking holidays that benefit other people rather than exploiting them, there are already clever plans that have been devised for non- polluting transport, and there is a body of wisdom available about our relationship with the natural world.

May our eyes be opened, our lips be unsealed, and our wills and desires be turned towards allowing lessons to be learned, and the good things that are already springing up abundantly to be nurtured and strengthened.