

Junior Church: Young Peoples' Group
Some Thoughts for the Week Beginning 21th June 2020

Hello Everyone,

I wonder what sort of week you have all had. Does one week feel the same as another? Have you listened with frustration to the debate on the opening of schools, each party to the discussion blaming the other for the lack of progress, fearful of what might happen if they get it wrong?

When you look back over lockdown how will you feel about it? Will you see it as a dead time to be endured or as an 'in between time' that leads to something new and transformative?

I'd like to share with you some of the events of my week that have helped shape my thinking about this strange period in which we are held in limbo.

First, I was made aware of the challenges facing young people when I was asked to attend a meeting to consider problems of antisocial behaviour. Many of these problems had resulted from the absence of school, the lack of purpose and stimulation. I was impressed that the police did not see this as a law enforcement issue but instead looked to find ways in which young lives could be stimulating and enjoyable. Young lives matter.

Then I attended a meeting with a group of people who have a variety of disabilities. We wanted to understand the challenges for them of the social distancing measures we are putting into the town centres. If a deaf person encounters a shop assistant with a mask how can they lip-read? How does a person with learning difficulties read the distancing instructions? How does a blind person make sense of queuing arrangements? Disabled people's lives matter.

For a disabled person, negotiating their way around a town centre is difficult at the best of times, but it is even more difficult at the moment. You don't have to be disabled to find the world a confusing and lonely place. This last week has been [loneliness awareness week](#). Did you know that there is a government minister for loneliness? Well there is. Loneliness is a huge problem affecting young and old and everyone in between. I was interested to read that the highest levels of wellbeing are in Orkney and Shetland, Fermanagh and Omagh. These are all places on the outer extremities of the UK where the sense of community is strong and people have more time for each other when compared with busier, more affluent areas elsewhere.

The ability now for people who live alone to form a support bubble with a family will make a big difference to many people during lockdown. On Saturday I formed a bubble with a family of three, meeting in a park, picnicking together, kicking a football and throwing a Frisbee. Social distancing was not required and the moment of greeting was the first time I had been able to touch another human being for

three months. It was a special moment for all of us. Making space for one another matters.

I cannot write about this week without commenting on an event in the news that many of you will have read about. It told the story and showed a picture of a [Black Lives Matter protestor carrying to safety a white counter-protestor](#) during a violent confrontation. In the eyes of the rescuer, when someone's life was in danger, all differences are set aside and the colour of a person's skin does not matter. It was a real Good Samaritan moment. It demonstrated the power of goodness over evil and that white and black lives matter equally.

My next event this week was my first face-to-face meeting since lockdown began. Social distancing was observed as we climbed up to the Downs to take in a view where an artist will work to create a place for visitors to rest and reflect. Before us was a 180-degree vista of the panorama from Reigate to Leith Hill. It truly was inspiring. Creation matters.

How do we view the landscape of our lockdown lives? Have we discovered, or did we already know, what is valuable? For some it has been a time of renewal and rest, of reviving hobbies or distant friendships. For other it has been one of illness, redundancy and loneliness. The Centre for Thriving Places asked people across the country during lockdown what they thought really matters. These things included community, nature, education and health and social care. The study stated, 'our rediscovered wisdom about what matters can be grown into an unstoppable movement to put ... [these things]...at the heart of how we live and thrive for generations'.

In our recent Bible readings we have encountered the disciples in this bewildering and messy transition from a disparate group of individuals arguing about who was the most important and fearful of the future into trusting and faithful apostles. In today's passage ([Matthew 10.24-33](#)) Jesus helps them to confront their fears, to see what is important and to know that God values them above all else.

Knowing that we are valued helps to counter loneliness, to face our fears, to challenge ourselves, to do amazing things, to address the future whatever it brings and to make God's world a better place.

Have a wonderful week, do amazing things and enjoy the lovely weather to come.

Rodney