

TEN STEPS TO TAKE IN MINISTRY AS WE EMERGE AGAIN

Be tuned into our own emotions

It's only been a few weeks, but these days have weighed heavily on each of us. What has happened to us in this time? What has changed that means we aren't the same person now? There's a lot we may not have figured out, because our feelings are complicated. But the chances are some of these emotions lie near to the surface, shown in the way tears come more easily or anger flares more readily. We won't be alone in this. Walking with others on this way and watching for the Jesus of Emmaus to sidle up is the slow but revealing journey we're on now.

What good habits have we learned in lockdown that we want to keep?

Many think of the lifting of lockdown as the chance for a re-boot, but what if the re-boot was the lockdown itself? We like to present as people in control of our lives, directing changes when they need to be made, fully signed up to the self-improvement agenda. But our environment plays a much bigger role in the shaping of our lives and character than we dare admit. We may not have intended these new habits, but some of them will have been good for us. So, which are the ones we must hold on to at all costs? Chances are, the Holy Spirit has been doing something we would be careless to let go of.

We should hit the ground listening

It's said that the hardest thing in leadership is to do nothing. We feel the onus to be doing something – and to be seen doing it. Activist, alpha leadership models have us running fast, to stay ahead of the game. But we are emerging after an earthquake. Those who do so don't rush to the nearest piece of rubble to remove it. They listen carefully for the frail voices of those crying out from under other masonry. More time than is comfortable might be spent listening for these voices, but the wait will be worth it.

It's OK not to have all the answers

In fluid, uncertain times, people want to invest trust in leaders. It makes them less anxious. Jumping on leaders who make mistakes is an expression of this. Right now, people are winging it in leadership across the UK, trying to make it up as they go along while pretending to be on top of things. It's alright to be confused and uncertain and to admit it, because we want to create an honest culture coming out of lockdown. Shared wisdom is called for. One person does not have all the answers. Unless it's one of those authoritarian leaders misleadingly photographed doing lots of macho stunts. And we have enough of those.

Keep a sabbath rhythm

Though lockdown feels like wading through treacle, there may be a better rhythm to how we live. Why sacrifice this on return? Rested people are more creative, able to hear and see things they can't when exhausted. They are also less risk-averse. We need a culture of appropriate risk-taking, especially in a world that has been up-ended. And we all know from experience the things we ducked doing because tiredness got the better of our spirit. Successive governments have shown they don't 'get' sabbath with their proposals. Someone has to hold the candle.

Let's care for the mental health of others

It's been a generational thing. There is still talk of mental breakdowns and people who can't cut it, but younger generations are leading the way in openness about mental well-being. We have been quiet in the Church, on the whole. People who struggle this way have sometimes been judged for lacking faith, as if overcoming clinical depression and other mental illnesses were merely an act of will. These last weeks, more people than ever have suffered. Let's make our teaching, learning and sharing as honest as possible, searching the scriptures for truths spoken and unspoken about living in a world not yet fully healed.

Discern who has lost out and devote our attention to them

Not everyone we minister among will have had a particularly hard time of it. Many of those who have may not be quick to speak, because trauma has that effect. Focus on the cohorts we know have suffered disproportionately, perhaps older people and those with a minority ethnic heritage, may help. But pastoral needs are expressed in person, and the people who need us will emerge from many places. And the pastoral needs of some still lie ahead of us. Younger people have been less at risk from the virus but are more at risk from recession. To listen to someone is to love them. It's the first step, and we can't take further steps without it.

We have a duty of care for the bodies of others

Words don't go far now. People want to see practical action. Those who care for the human body are acclaimed. Those who abuse it are being exposed for their deeds, not before time. It is a litmus test of credibility. We know the early Church authenticated the Gospel with acts of healing and charity. Many human bodies will suffer in the time ahead. The Church has in many places stepped up to the mark in community engagement this last decade. The needs will grow. They may also widen. We can't do everything. But Jesus is in every person we help. We should never underestimate the power of one.

Divide goals into recovery, re-imagination and reach

There are things we need to do to *recover* what we had. This may take longer in some places than in others, but nowhere is it going to be a quick fix, this side of a vaccine. Don't feel guilty for lingering there. There is a work of *re-imagination*, too. It can be a drag, being told everything is an opportunity to grasp, but a crisis always presents openings. Where is the window in the sky that God has opened, to lend his hand? There may be things we can do now we never dreamed of before, that are within our grasp, maybe even in our lap. And while we want the Church – our church – to grow, there is now a new cohort of people within *reach* digitally. The paradox that attendees at our services grew after we had locked the churches should not be lost on us. It has the feel of one of St Luke's counter-intuitions; where the world is tipped upside down to reveal the Kingdom of God. There is a cloud of witnesses in the Cloud we now know we can reach.

Let's proclaim the living hope through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

No, this isn't the least important because it's last. The last shall be first. We believe in the resurrection of the body. In a society short on hope, we have something utterly distinctive and life-saving to share. There is a Gospel to proclaim, not to excuse. Not being able to say much about God and where he has been these last few weeks will only reinforce some people in thinking our faith is not durable in a crisis. But our boldness should be rooted in a listening spirit. All evangelism starts with our ears and our eyes, not our mouths. What has changed in people, in us? God will give us clues and prompts if we are alert to them.

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