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*Genesis 8: 1-11 & Gospel of John 16: 16-22*

Seven weeks ago some of us were at Cumberland Lodge for the first of the Inn's Student Weekends, and only beginning to realise what the impact of the Corona Virus might be. We've now had seven weeks of lockdown and no clear picture of when we will start to come out of it.

This is a difficult time for many, especially those who has lost loved ones, and those working on the "front line". Those of us over 70 have been told to stay at home and I'm trying to support some of our chaplains by phone or email. A hospital chaplain tells me that his most difficult task is ministering to medical staff who get ill, and where one of their own colleagues has died. A prison chaplain describes how the already over-crowded and insanitary conditions have been made even worse, with the inmates locked down for most of the day, and all other activities suspended.

Within the Inn, and the legal profession more generally, some staff are doing what they can while others are stuck at home. Access to online communication makes a great difference, but scope is limited and it cannot take the place of real meeting. And we know that the greatest impact is on the newer and younger members of the Bar, some of whom have no income and little savings. The Inn is trying to help, through the Barristers Benevolent Association, and a hardship fund.

Like Noah in our first Lesson, we look for signs of hope, that this hidden enemy may be defeated, that the flood which has covered the earth may begin to subside. Noah sends out a raven, but it can find no place to land. So too the dove. But on a second time attempt the dove returns with a leaf from an olive tree. And so Noah knows that the time of danger and isolation is coming to an end. And later on God gives to Noah a sign that all shall be well – the sign of the rainbow.

This coming Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, would, in more normal times, have marked two things. First, its VE Day, and this year the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, which is why the Bank Holiday was changed. In economic terms many people have likened the Corvid19 epidemic with the Great

Depression of the 1920s or the Economic Crisis of 2008. Certainly we will again face the need to rebuild our economy. And I wonder whether, again, it will be the poorest people who will pay the largest cost.

But it could also be, as happened in the years that followed VE and then VJ Day, an opportunity to ask what kind of society, and therefore what kind of economy, we want to build. As in the War years, we are suffering together, and owe so much to those on the frontline, many of whom are risking their own lives for others. In the post-War period that led to major advances in health care, educational opportunity, affordable housing, and social equality. Will we come out of this current crisis ready to embrace such opportunity, or simply return to the old, sad “normality”?

This coming Friday has a second significance. It's the feast day of St Julian of Norwich. I've talked about her a number of times in Chapel, and some people were surprised that they'd not heard of her before. She lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century when plague epidemics were rampant, and it's been suggested that she lost her family when the Black Death struck the city of Norwich. She knew about epidemics. But out of her own suffering, the suffering she saw all around her, and in contemplation of the suffering of Christ on the Cross, she wrote down her Revelations of Divine Love. It was to become the first book written in English by a woman.

She writes of God's love as “our clothing, that wraps, clasps and encloses us so as to never leave us”. She has no problem speaking of God as our Mother, the one who cares for us and feeds us from herself. Her faith is best summed up in her affirmation “All shall be well” – not false piety, not shallow optimism, but real Hope. God will see us through, in this life and the next. That, in a nutshell, is our Easter faith.

It's what Jesus meant, as we heard in the New Testament lesson set for this Sunday, when he told his disciples: you will have sorrow, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. He said it on the night before he died, before he went to the Cross. There will be suffering, and God is known as much in the suffering as anywhere else. But there will also be Resurrection. “Now therefore you have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no-one will take from you”.

*Owing to the closure of the Chapel due to the CoronaVirus, this sermon was delivered as part of an Audio Service made available on the Inn's website*