

Rock of ages

Dorrien Davies, Archdeacon of Carmarthen, has experienced a turmoil of emotions during the lockdown but finds himself in a new and exciting relationship with God

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 virus, we have been overwhelmed with the sad and terrible effects of the pandemic upon our world. Whole communities and social structures have been challenged in ways not experienced for many years, possibly centuries. Isolation, social distancing and panic, have caused us all to consider our lives and how we live them. For many it has brought the understanding of life and death issues closer than ever before. For some, faith has been lost or challenged. For others it has been strengthened or restored. Relationships may have gelled whilst others may have been destroyed. All in all, it has been overwhelming and the confusion of political machinations have complicated peoples’ understanding of what should be right, moral and ethical in the face of a worldwide crisis.

During my own struggles of the past long weeks, I have experienced fear, frustration, anger and bemusement. Being limited in the way that we have has really brought us face to face with ourselves, and for me this has included my relationship with God, with whom I have suddenly found myself in a real and different dialogue. It’s not merely theological or philosophical, but a one-to-one conversation, which is deeper and different; in some ways it transcends prayer (if you know what I mean). God’s love and grace in how He deals with me and my ramblings, rantings, fear, accusations and sometimes spiritual collapse, has changed my perspective. Virtues within me suddenly are recategorized through the all-consuming love of God. His all-encompassing self has enabled me to understand the peace which He so readily gives, the calm He bestows, and the fear within me which He does not only allay but takes away. Suddenly God is leading me in different, wonderful and beautiful ways full of challenge and excitement.

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learnt the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” (Phil 4: 12-13)

I have been worried about how we, as Church, are going to cope when lockdown is eventually lifted. There are many aspects of how we have “been Church” during this time, which are changing our perspective of what the Church has been, is, and will be. As a result of the restrictions put upon us, we have had to adapt, and frankly despite many difficulties it hasn’t been totally negative. I ask myself if the Spirit of God is leading us, individually and collectively, into a new understanding of the relationship He shares with us and His will for His church. Only time will tell. What the period of isolation has taught me as a Christian is to trust. Even in the face of uncertainty, God is in control and opens new avenues and renews and reveals aspects of Himself, hitherto hidden. This has been part of my experience and relationship with God which I wanted to share with you.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Rom 12: 2)

Possibly, as we return to our church buildings, sharing our fellowship and communicating our experiences of God during lockdown, we will be surprised where God has led us and where we find ourselves. I would like to share with you these words by H H Barry, which are a reflection on the 23rd

Psalm. It summarises what I've tried to say of my own experiences and will, hopefully, reassure you that whatever is before us God is with us.

"In pastures green?" - Not always. Sometimes
He, who knoweth best, in kindness leadeth me
In weary ways, where heavy shadows be;
Out of the sunshine warm and soft and bright,
Out of the sunshine into darkest night;
I oft would faint with sorrow and affright,
Only for this, I know He holds my hand;
So whether led in green or desert land,
I trust, although I may not understand.

"And by still waters?" - No, not always so.
Ofttimes the heavy tempests round me blow,
And o'er my soul the waves and billows go.
But when the storm beats loudest, and I cry
Aloud for help, the Master standeth by,
And whispers to my soul, 'Lo, it is I!"
Above the tempest wild I hear Him say,
"Beyond the darkness lies the perfect day;
In every path of thine I lead the way."

So, whether on the hilltops high and fair
I dwell, or in the sunless valleys where
The shadows lie, what matter? He is there;
And more than this, where'er the pathway
Lead He gives to me no helpless broken reed,
But His own hand, sufficient for my need.
So where He leads me I can safely go;
And in the blest hereafter I shall know
Why, in His wisdom, He hath led me so.