

(Divine?) Interruptions!



A week or so into lockdown, my watch battery packed up. I haven't bothered to source another, so my watch has not been on my wrist since then. Occasionally I glance at the place where it usually is, but, so far, I haven't missed it.

I realise that my lack of clock-watching, or wrist- watch glancing, can be construed as a luxury by those who have kept our essential services running, and who are probably now in desperate need of the 4 'R's – Rest, Relaxation and Respite from Ridiculous government diktats! I, for one, am immensely grateful, and salute their selfless and courageous service. Surely, a reassessment of the value and importance of their jobs, with appropriate financial recompense, is long overdue.

Have you noticed the subtle changes in mood that are taking place as we progress through the weeks of lockdown? Not necessarily in this order: shock, disbelief, finding creative ways to adjust and come to terms with enforced incarceration, encroaching boredom as all those long postponed jobs are being ticked off the 'to do' list, (that is if you can get the materials!), disorientation, as our usual routines are now 'out of the window', apprehensiveness – 'what if.....?' 'How will I.....?', and now I perceive a more fearful mood as the weeks crawl - or fly - , (depending on your perspective), by, and the uncertainties (and deaths) pile up. I have taken to limiting my exposure to daily news as I try to negotiate a path through the 'fake news' and media hyperbole, preferring to adopt a more prosaic and intuitive attitude in response to CV 19. We each develop our own coping strategies – one of mine is to give my sewing machine an intense workout!

I have also tried to carve out more time from my day for 'time out' and reflection. I have identified a series of stages we are going through:

- Stage 1: an initial collective response (we're in this together), evident when there was a collective empathy with the PM when he became ill with CV19.
- Stage 2: Personal internalization – (it's happened, and we'll have to get on with coping as best we can).
- Stage 3: Emerging tensions: differing ideas about how, as a society, we can operate safely after lockdown eases, coupled with differing priorities within different sections of society.
- Stage 4: A pervasive fear of the, as yet, unknown obstacles we'll have to contend with when we emerge from lockdown.

This is where it might be opportune to mention 'anxiety', which is looming large in many lives at present.

"Do not be anxious, for tomorrow will take care of itself", Jesus instructs us. (Luke 12: 22-31).

This advice is rather counter-cultural for us; we are conditioned to make plans, financial or otherwise, for our security and peace of mind. We value 'security'. How can we find security in our present chaotic world? Again, look in the Bible. Both the Old Testament and New Testament comprise largely of stories set against the background of trauma and God's dealings with traumatized people. Those stories have a lot to teach us.

In an online article Rev'd Will van der Hart opens his heart when he writes:

"I realise that I have been feeling as much anxiety about the interruptions to my plans as I have about getting physically sick". He goes on to explain how packed his diarised life had become and how, as a naturally anxious person, he had become "addicted to activity and scheduling" to distract himself from his worries. "My busyness", he says, "is the product of culture, ambition and illness, not something that is easily broken on a whim". He is of the opinion that this '*interruption*' in our lives "is an opportunity to re-order our priorities so that we might be more able and willing to hear {God}".

Amen to that!

Some of you may be familiar with the writing of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German priest and theologian implicated in the plot to murder Hitler, and subsequently imprisoned and put to death by the Nazi's. In his book 'Life Together', he writes:

"We must be ready to allow ourselves to be *interrupted* by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and cancelling our plans....."

So, where at this time of pandemic is God in all of this, and where is he leading us?

Firstly, the Bible assures us that God is walking alongside us (Matt 28:20) – the bereaved, the hurting, the lonely, the self-isolated, the desperate – in fact, all of us: we're in this together. Will we choose to listen to what he is saying to us at this time (and beyond)?

Speaking in the ecumenical service presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury on Pentecost Sunday, the Pope said, **“The Lord is asking us to change course”**.

In his article, Will van der Hart offers, **“Bonhoeffer would have seen this pandemic as an opportunity to re-order our priorities”**.

Just as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) was a pivotal moment for the Christian faith, so, I believe, we are facing a defining moment in the history (survival?) of our planet. Will the current situation be the catalyst for genuine life-affirming change for the well-being of this wonderful planet we live in? What, I wonder, will be our legacy from this period? What is 'Stage 5' going to look like?

Apparently, the Chinese symbol for 'crisis' is made up of 2 strokes –one meaning **'danger'** (wei) and one meaning **'opportunity'** (gee). I hope to have the opportunity to communicate with you again a little further 'down the line'. Meanwhile, may God's peace be with you and yours.....

Elaine

(Philippians 4: 6-8)



A new dawn in Spain