

Holy Trinity Redditch

Life



Paul Lawlor muses upon his experience of Lockdown

How are you? How you are responding to this time of national, indeed global, challenge will depend upon many things. As a family unit, Judi and I are comfortable but still have worries about children and parents. But, in the grand scheme of things we are lucky, and we feel OK.

I want to push past immediate practical stuff; I want us to reflect on how we are doing in our spirit. Many of you will know me well enough to know that I am energised by being with people. This lockdown period limits that, it has also prevented us from gathering as a church, as a group of people and prevented us from being in our church buildings and engaging in the ceremonial aspects of our shared life.

We are doing services on-line, and that is great, but, for me, it is incomplete somehow. I am not one who is desperate to return into the building, you will not find me filming morning prayer from St Stephen's; neither am I a minister whose identity and purpose are bound to the building. So, what is it that I am missing?

I believe that what I am missing can be revealed if we look at the difference between a monk and a hermit. If we look at the life of a Benedictine monk, there is silence, but this is held by work and prayer. The prayer aspect being both corporate, held by the daily offices, and solitary. For a hermit, the corporate element is lost. This points to be first thing I am yearning for: in the monastery the bell rings and the community gather for worship. There is a duty, a responsibility, to gather and to worship together. For me, the In Real Life, daily prayer held each morning at St Stephen's holds me because I am duty bound to be there. Others will miss me if I fail to turn up. I don't pray simply out of duty, or guilt, it I do not, but "if you love me you will obey what I command." *John 14.15*

Place or the ritual of our worship can do the same thing. It provides a touching point; it provides a structure or framework for us to connect to. Without the structure some of us will simply drift our minds wander. We know where we want to be and what we ought to do but a collection of other things get in the way.

This all reminds me of St Paul's struggles of Romans 7.15 and following...

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Paul's struggles relate to the Law, however, our holding to spiritual discipline can feel very similar. I want to spend time with God, I want to know the delight of being very consciously in God's presence of discerning this physically. But, without people or place or practice to bring me and hold me, I can struggle to make the time.

So, what is the answer for those of us who struggle with this:

Don't be in the habit of not meeting together.

How, I hear you cry? If you live with others who would be receptive, set time aside to pray together. If you live alone, then phone a friend. It may feel odd pray over the phone, or use Zoom or Skype etc. or perhaps the prayer or services we stream from Holy Trinity Redditch or provided by others helps you.

Where the structure is not provided for you, look at using some simple liturgy.

Keep it short, don't make our time such a huge amount of work, that we cannot quite manage to do it. When Jesus disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He did not send them a 12 weeks course and tell them to pray for hours upon end. His response was the Lord's Prayer.

By praying together, we can remember that we remain a community of faith and not a scattered church of hermits. We remain together, not isolated, and alone.

A Call to Persevere in Faith

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10.19-25 NIV

Love God rather than the organisation or the ritual

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

John 14.15-21 NIV

The primary thing which holds us together is God’s love for us.

In response, our first love needs to Jesus. If we love Him we will want to spend time in the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Spirit will hold us together and empower us.

As we seek to know God’s Spirit at work in us our prayer and our very desires will come more and more into alignment with His will.

Through us, with us and in us God’s love flows down, out to others and back up to our Lord, our Saviour, our God.

So, if you are finding this time spiritually tough, if this feels like a desert, seek ways to be a dispersed **community**. Find things which hold you, ground you be accountable to others, share with others. Most all know that you are a loved child of God.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1 John 3.1 NIV