

Love Prevails

With everything going on at the moment, Coronavirus infections rates rising rapidly and the imposition of a second lockdown to combat this second wave, it can feel very much like we are living in a town and city under siege. We may be feeling some of the same emotions as those living through a siege; anxiety, fear, horror. We may experience some of the same questions; will our children have enough to eat?; do we have enough supplies to last?; will it all be over by Christmas? And like those trapped together for a long period during a crisis, we can be at risk of turning on one another, whether that be our leaders or people around us we judge to be over- or under-reacting to the situation.

For Christians and Jews, at times of community tension and calamity, the Psalms offer a source of comfort and inspiration. In previous letters I have taken us to this ancient repository of poetic songs to help our thanksgiving. This time I want to direct us towards those psalms known as psalms of lament; psalms which name and pour out the writer's troubles and the sufferings of the community before God, calling on and challenging God to come to the aid of the people who God loves, often recalling how God has done so in the past. Many of these psalms use Jerusalem as an inspiration, the designated Holy City atop Mount Zion where God was known to dwell; fortified, besieged, destroyed and delivered on multiple occasions. Some of these verses can speak to our current feelings of isolation, anxiety and being hemmed in by seemingly unstoppable forces beyond our control.

*"O Jerusalem; Jerusalem, built as a city that is at unity in itself...
Sing praise to the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion;
For he has strengthened the bars of your gates and has blest your children within you. He has established peace in your borders and satisfies you with the finest wheat...
Let Mount Zion be glad, let the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgements. Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers, consider well its ramparts; go through its citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide for ever."*¹

These verses bring together linked themes of striving for unity and for God's guidance during times of crisis, and that these are the fortifications that will hold us secure against the storms and forces battering our gates, trusting in those things we know to be sure certainties even if we can't see them at the moment. People of faith have had plenty of opportunity to practice this, we are used to holding to our hope in things unseen, however for all of us this remains a tough ask right now. But we can help each other, working together to support each other until these sure certainties become more visible and accessible to us again. They may be our friends and family. They may be loved ones we have lost, before and during this pandemic. Part of standing together in unity is standing with and comforting one another as we lament those things and people dear to us who we have lost.

Remembrance Sunday offers us an opportunity to do this. Although we cannot meet together this year for a service or parade, St. Andrew's and St. Crispin's churches invite you

¹ Psalm 122:3 (Church of England: Daily Prayer), Psalm 147:13-15 (Church of England: Daily Prayer), Psalm 48:11-14 (NRSV).

to join us on Facebook at 10:30am on Sunday 8th November for an online Remembrance Service. You can access this service at www.facebook.com/StCrispinsBraunstone or www.facebook.com/StAndrewsLFE. Braunstone Town Council will be streaming a short Act of Remembrance on 11th November. Both of these services will include an opportunity to hold a 2-minute silence, which we invite you to observe either in your home or by standing on your front doorstep. We may not be able to stand together physically, but together we stand to honour our fallen service-personnel and all victims of war and hate. We are also inviting everyone to display a poppy, some artwork or message of support in our windows over the Remembrance week; some ideas are available for download on the British Legion website <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance?seg=XPBPPC>.

In December we will be inviting you to join us again in an online service to remember those we have loved who we see no longer, who have died and are now at rest. More details of that will follow, but if there is a name of someone who has died you would like us to remember in this service, please email, message or call me and I would be more than happy to include them.

After this it will soon be Christmas, which will happen in some form. It may not be as we have marked it in the past, but there will still be a Christmas and a time to celebrate the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ, born to save us. Christmas could not be stopped by a despotic, homicidal ruler (King Herod); it wasn't stopped by the poverty of the stable Christ was born into or of the manger he was laid in; Christmas has not been stopped through 2000 years of history (which has included times of state repression, including the Puritans' attempt to ban its celebration in the 17th century); and Christmas will not be stopped this year by the Coronavirus. For Christmas is at its heart a harvest of love and goodwill, of which there is no end. Christian tradition and the Bible teach that all the love in the world flows from God²; God pours love into the world and we share that with one another. This divine root of love is revealed in God's sending of God's Son to be born among us – to reveal that love and goodwill for us in Christ's coming to save us and lay down his life in love for us. The true spirit of Christmas is love, and love never dies. Death cannot hold it, and like energy it cannot be destroyed – merely be transformed into other forms as it is passed on and shared. We will in all likelihood have to share that love differently this Christmas, but it will still be as real and true as it always was. For love is the eternal flame shining in a dark world that never goes out; neither war, nor pestilence, nor famine, nor death can snuff it out. For Love has been through and taken care of all that in the past, and will do again. Love always prevails in the end and cannot be extinguished. Nothing whatsoever can separate us from the love of God and the love we hold for one another. In that is our sure defence and certainty that we will come through this time of crisis – together.

Amen.

Revd Dave Hover
Priest-in-charge for St. Andrew's, Leicester Forest East
& St. Crispin's, Braunstone Town with Thorpe Astley



² "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).