

A Strange Land

It's as if we've woken up in another country, or else are still dreaming and would be quite glad to wake up! Everyone is finding it strange and disorientating. For many, life is less busy but there are different problems, such as food supplies. For others, their days must be hectic and full of pressures, as they cope with new situations and make the sort of decisions they've not faced before. Whether we are 7 or 70 plus, it's all a bit confusing and probably makes us feel wobbly at times, even if we manage mostly to be positive and adapt to the challenge.

Something like this crisis, only worse, happened to the People of Israel in the 6th century BC, when they were overcome by the Babylonians and carried away, many of them, into captivity.

"How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137)

Nothing was the same, all was confusion. They were wrong, as it turned out, though their gloom was understandable. But God was the same; He was with them and was still the Lord of all, who would, in time, bring good for them out of evil.

A huge amount of good seems to be springing up in the present crisis, with people, groups and businesses doing what they can to help, from delivering essentials to suggesting activities for young or old, as well as working to protect us and keep vital things running. It all seems to be changing the way we look at life. It's making us value each other more. People we so often take for granted, such as food suppliers, health workers and so many others are seen as vital, which of course they are. It also feels as if "us and them" is turning into simply "us"; we realise we are all in it together, which surely must be true in ordinary, as well as troubled, times. Alexander McCall Smith has written a poem for these days and here's a part of it.

And so we turn again to face each other
And discover those things
We had almost forgotten
But that, mercifully, are still there:
Love and friendship, not just for those
To whom we are closest.....

We discover things we had put aside:
Old board games with obscure rules,
Books we had been meaning to read,
Letters we had been meaning to write,
Things we had thought we might say
But for which we never found the time.....

So, thank God for all the caring going on (surely signs of his Spirit), for the work, the help, the tips, the humour and the love. Thanks, too, for the bits we ourselves can do, whether it's our work, a phone call, a smile in the street, an errand or a prayer. When more normal times return, may we keep some of the things we've learnt, including trusting and noticing people more, and knowing that we have so much which binds us together.

Meanwhile, God is with us and loves us. We can put our hand into his and draw on his strength. We can also take hold of one another's hands, though not physically, as we discover more about living together in this wonderful, though sometimes dangerous, life.
Mark B-P