

# Lift up your hearts



**Jemima Thackray** continues our series

**L**IFE in lockdown has felt impossibly condensed and unrelenting — and yet somehow rarefied. The tasks of looking after (and now home-schooling) three young children, juggled with my paid work and ordination studies, all within the confines of home, and without any social contours, have put even the most mundane tasks into sharp relief.

I've turned to the witty and whimsical, if rather old-fashioned, writing of the chef, food columnist, and Episcopalian priest Robert Farrar Capon, whose **books** comfotingly mix a love of food and theology, and who writes about the sacredness of things: "It is some-times easy to get the impression that Christians take a dim view of things. Poor old matter, like poor old flesh, takes a bad drubbing. Far from caring too much for it, we are forever beating it out of its natural shape into fetishes and status symbols which are more to our liking.

"But the Christian religion is not about the soul: it is about man, body and all, and about the world of things with which it was created, and in which he is redeemed. Don't knock materiality. God invented it. Things, as such, are never bad; they are not even indifferent. They are positively good.

Let a man just once really face fish or fowl, bread or wine, shoelace or gummed label, and he will know he has by no means lowered himself. In lifting them up, he himself grows taller" (Bed and Board).



**O**UR lives have slowed to become a series of small acts of caring for things. The children and I have baked brownies, planted carrots, and painted pictures, all with a new poignancy. At the start of lockdown, we took on some ex-battery chickens, which arrived scrawny, their tail feathers pecked away, wild-eyed with terror. Now, after a bit of care, they are plump and downy, clucking affectionately around our legs, and — to the children's delight — regularly laying double-yolkers.

This care has extended to our own bodies, at a time when they seem more precious than ever. We've done PE with Joe Wicks every day, and even attempted some family yoga sessions (check out Cosmic Kids Yoga on YouTube). I came across the "Body Prayer", a physical enactment of prayer inspired by the writings of Julian of Norwich; in the absence of any space to pray alone, the following postures have become part of worship-cum-yoga practice:

**AWAIT** (hands cupped at waist, awaiting God's presence);  
**ALLOW** (hands reaching up, allowing God's presence to come);  
**ACCEPT** (hands at heart, accept-

ing as a gift whatever comes or does not come);  
**ATTEND** (hands outstretched, ready to attend to what you are called to).

**T**HE most treasured **picture** in my house also holds this sense of astonishment at the human body: a large photograph of Antony Gormley's sculpture *Sound II*, which stands in the crypt of Winchester Cathedral. The figure looks down into his hands, vulnerable in his nudity, marvelling at his own body, fearfully and wonderfully put together.

Capon writes of this sense of wonder as he observes his children playing: "What surprises me is that they are here at all. Why should they be? Everything is unnecessary. The cancer in the blood and the blood it destroys; the truck on the highway and the squirrel it crushes; and they and I and Joseph and Abraham; and earth and stars and sky and ocean.

"What do we mean, being substantial? The only possible answer is simply that God was pleased to make us so. But while the reply is intelligible in its form, it is absurd

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in its content: Our being, our substantiality and our freedom are left with no reason other than his unsearchable counsel. The absurdity, you see, goes home to God.”

THE **Bible** passage I have turned to in lockdown is Job’s cry of hope, bursting forth even after so much suffering:

I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.  
(Job 19.25-26)

It is a vision of a redeemer made of flesh and bone, whose soles will walk on the warm earth, and a resurrection not of disembodied spirits, but of physical presence, insisting that matter matters; our beings are not dispensable.

Recent events make this a hard truth to hold on to — the brutalising of yet more

black bodies in the United States, and the statistics showing how disproportionately people from black and ethnic minorities are affected by Covid-19: both stark reminders that bodies are not, after all, neutral. They are places of safety only for the privileged; for many, they are marked out for institutionalised violence, health inequality, and generational trauma.

I highly recommend the Netflix drama *When They See Us*, a true story of racial injustice, as perhaps not a comforting but a confronting lockdown view, at a time when many of us are open to a different future.

FOR all the potential of this next moment, however, there is need of much healing and care right now: bereaved families to support, livelihoods to rebuild, and fragile minds and relationships to piece back together. Even in my own protected and privileged children, I see a strange legacy as

they back away from people they would normally run towards.

OUR lockdown **track**, “But for you who fear my name”, by the gospel/indie band the Welcome Wagon, features a singing congregation beating tambourines and whooping with joy. The children and I sing along loudly in the car; and the lyrics, based on the words of the prophet Micah, are my prayer for us all as we emerge from lockdown:

But for you who fear my name  
The Son of righteousness will rise  
With healing in his wings,  
And you shall go forth again  
And skip about like calves  
Coming from their stalls at last.

*Jemima Thackray is a journalist and ordinand.*

**Next week:** *Anna Matthews*

## More than recovery

**IN KEEPING with this week’s news announcements, Christopher Cocksworth compares the easing of the lockdown with the resurrection**

FOR many of us, lockdown was a Good Friday experience. So much of that which we loved and our ways of serving our parishes and communities were taken from us. It felt like some sort of death.

It was if we were plunged into a sort of Holy Saturday existence: a disembodied form of life in which we had to learn how to connect as Christ’s people virtually — we could call it spiritually — without physical contact, and find ways to reach out to people whom we longed to serve pastorally and missionally by all sorts of means short of being in the same place together.

Amazing things have happened over these months, and, perhaps, a little like Jesus, who descended into the abode of the dead and “made proclamation to the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3.19), we have been able to reach some of those who, beyond our reach before, were just waiting for the welcome of Christ to be made known to them.

Although, as 1 Peter tells us, Jesus had been “made alive in the spirit”, God, of course, had more for him, for his followers, and for the creation for which he died. God

purposed nothing less than the resurrection of the body, the renewal of creation, the fullness of the fully social reality of the Kingdom of God.

On the day of resurrection, when Jesus came and stood among the lockdown disciples, that was only the beginning of the necessary journey of recovery. Despair and disbelief needed to be dispelled by faith in the resurrected one. Fear needed casting out by peace. Feelings of failure and disempowerment needed to be overcome by the breath of God’s Spirit and the commissioning of Christ (John 20.19-29).

As we come out of lockdown step by step, there will be need for us to recover — to recover our buildings, our public worship, our sacraments, our patterns of pastoral care, our finances. Recovery will be different for us all: church communities, schools, cathedral, and, even our remarkable chaplaincies who have ministered so faithfully in these times. And each of us, personally, will need to recover.

But the first disciples did more than recover, because Jesus did more than recover. Jesus was raised into life: life consistent and continuous with what had gone before, but new and transformed life; life that brought — and is bringing — the whole of creation into the renewed, redeemed life of the kingdom of God. The disciples were invited to step into the flow — a mighty, unstoppable tidal flow — of God’s powerful purposes present in the reality of the risen life of Jesus.

That same invitation comes to us in its own way, shaped for our particular circumstances. We will need to recover, of



*Christ in Glory in the Tetramorph*, the 1962 tapestry by Graham Sutherland, behind the high altar in Coventry Cathedral

course, but we are called to do more than recover. We are called to renewal, to resurrection, to keep moving with the purposes of God fulfilled in Jesus, who died was buried and rose again for us and for our salvation.

Now, as in every time, especially times of threat and danger, we are invited to receive the power of God that raised Jesus from the grave.

*Dr Cocksworth is the Bishop of Coventry. This is an extract from his address to his diocesan synod on Tuesday evening.*