

**Sermon by Rev. Wendy Sellers,
Wednesday 1 April 2020**

*(Reading taken from today's Church of England
Morning Prayer - Lamentations 1.12, 16a, b; 3. 19, 21-
26, 31-33)*

Before I was priested, I had coffee with Bishop Alan. "Let's start," he suggested, "by tackling the 'elephant in the room'". I'm sorry to report that the Bishop doesn't actually own an elephant, although his drawing room is large enough to house one.

He, of course, meant my eye sight problems. And, so, we talked about some of the beliefs described in the words we have just heard. That God would never deliberately afflict or grieve us. That our experience of God constantly reveals his great goodness and his faithfulness. And the Bishop said that he thought benefit could come from my affliction. That God would use something bad to produce good. After all, God turned Good Friday into Easter.

The past 18 months have been life changing and I am sure that I would be different, both as a person and minister, if I was not visually challenged. I have had to learn to live with uncertainty, to give up some control and to allow others to see my vulnerabilities and support me through those. It turns out all this was good preparation for March 2020.

If God can work good through my eyes, then I am sure he can also work good through this pandemic. Our plans, it turns out, have been torn up and thrown out of the window. But, at the end of it all, I believe we can

come out of it learning about ourselves, our society and our church.

None of us can pretend our society was perfect before this. Over the past years there has been an increasing sense of entitlement - that we can and should have it all. It turns out we can't, and we shouldn't.

We have got too used to having whatever we want: one click and it's yours by next-day delivery. You don't even need to pay - yet. We have got used to going wherever we want; to hop in a car or on a budget airline.

But this current situation has highlighted that this was never true for the poor. We are discovering that many people and businesses in the UK have no resources to get them through a lean period.

This is even worse in the developing world. In India, for example, millions live hand-to-mouth on day wages. The lockdown has left them instantly unemployed, homeless and destitute.

We are discovering that we have not appreciated our universal access to healthcare as we should. It seems many in the world have no healthcare available - including citizens of the world's richest nations. I pray that once this is over, we relearn the value and cost of adequate social and health care.

Nor have we appreciated the willingness of others to, literally, put their lives on the line for us as part of their job. Let's not forget that afterwards.

The same goes for the education system. Believe me, as a teacher, you tend to get complaints rather than praise. If all this goes on for six months, as suggested, I'm thinking parents might appreciate schools, and all they do, a little more.

Then we have truly realised how many people live isolated and unsupported. As a result, we have seen community and national efforts to support the elderly and vulnerable, so that they can effectively self-isolate. Let's not lose that afterwards. To be honest, I've always seen that mutual care in church communities - but it has spread so much wider now.

We have all become increasingly worried about social media and the excessive use of technology in our lives. Yet now we have seen in a new way how useful technology can be. Here we are 'doing church' online. Technology has kept families and friends together, and I suspect many people are in contact more frequently, rather than less.

After this, will we see a new form of church? One where we can involve people remotely when they can't make it to a service, or just choose to engage with a church of their choice? One where your curate can attend PCC remotely because she can't drive in the dark? One where we proactively check up on people and reach out to people? One where many more people access meditation and mindfulness or story-time with Alan or Tracy?

There is going to be much work to be done to get people back to where they should be mentally and emotionally. We are, in effect, suffering a huge mutual

trauma, because the world has so radically changed in a month. We are going to have to think about how we help with that – how, for example, we help people grieve and mourn when a funeral couldn't be attended.

The end of self-isolation and social distancing will not mean business as usual. Or, at least, not just that. Hopefully we can have what we had before in church, but even more. The national church's focus on getting people into the building may well need to be refined by a realisation that times have changed, radically. When something is turned entirely upside down, it has to be viewed anew, creatively. As a result, we will probably choose to do things differently after this.

We know God can do anything. The miraculous, the astounding, the impossible. We often try to limit Him. Even to blame Him. I pray at the end of all this we will allow Him to work in our churches and our world, so that good may result from 'our affliction and our bitterness'.

