

# **Sermon on Wednesday 29 April 2020**

**by Rev. Alan's sermon**

## **Loneliness in Lockdown**

For the past few weeks, my wife, Rachel, has been somewhat Mutt and Jeff; that's deaf to those not fluent in Cockney Rhyming slang. This has been caused by a build-up of wax in her ears. Thankfully, her hearing has returned, but it did give us all a little insight into the non-hearing world, in particular just how exhausting it can be to engage with others, but also how isolated it can make a person feel.

I imagine we all have experienced a little more insight into isolation in these past days and weeks. Some of us, of course, thrive on aloneness, but most of us, I imagine, are beginning to crave contact or the company of others, especially if we live alone, or we're self-isolating or we're just a bit fed up with whoever we happen to share our Rat and Mouse with!

Loneliness, as we know, can often be debilitating, sometimes destructive. And, of course, it's possible to be lonely even in a crowd, in a family, even in a marriage.

Loneliness, I think, is a kind of grief; a grief for intimacy and, by the same token, grief itself, as most of us will know, is a lonely thing. Later today I have the privilege of conducting a graveside service for a family whose grief

was made more lonely by their not physically being able to be there at the end, and now, of course, different households within that same family are denied the comfort of the embrace of each other.

Just as one person's grief isn't the same as another's, so your loneliness will be different to my loneliness, so in what I want to say this morning, I would never want to claim that I know how you feel or indeed have any answers.

All I can say is that, in my own experience, I've found it helpful to try to befriend my loneliness. What I mean by that is that rather than resent it, I try, instead, when I remember, to accept it as part of what it means to be human; as proof of my need for something more, something other, someone beyond.

What I'm trying to say is that I think my loneliness is a symptom of a deeper loneliness; a loneliness for the One I was created by and for.

Jesus sought out the lonely places, because there, stripped of distraction, he could hear himself and his need for God.

Some of us will have a deep sense of God's presence, and other's not. And that has nothing to do with divine favouritism, it's just how it is; we relate differently.

Regardless of our experience, or lack of, we will all at times have known the absence of God; and that's normal. Rather than focusing on absence, however, I try, again when I remember, to focus on presence. You see, God is not only found in feelings, he is to be found in all that lives. As Richard Rohr says, 'God comes to us disguised as our lives'. And here I find the poetry of Mary Oliver especially helpful; as she was someone who learnt early that secret that all of life is infused with the Presence (capital P), especially the natural world.

Today, then, I'd invite us all to look for the God who comes disguised as our lives; in the ordinary and the small and the beautiful. If you can leave your home for daily exercise, then welcome the presence of God in the living world; if you can't, then welcome him in what you can see from your window.

So, let me end with one of Mary Oliver's poems, appropriately titled Loneliness.

*I, too, have known loneliness. I, too, have known what it is to feel misunderstood, rejected, and suddenly not at all beautiful. Oh, Mother Earth, your comfort is great, your arms never withhold. It has saved my life to know this. Your rivers flowing, your roses opening in the morning. Oh, motions of tenderness.*