

Reflections on Covid One-Year Anniversary

Wednesday 24 March 2021

by Rev. Wendy Sellers

We normally have two readings, then the sermon then the prayers. We are going to do things a bit differently today.



Yesterday was the anniversary of the date we entered the first lockdown. It was marked as a day of reflection, and I'm sure many of you will have participated in that. It is, of course, too soon for Remembrance, because we are still in the midst of this pandemic. There is some hope

for the UK due to the vaccine roll out. But much of the world is still seeing many cases of infection and thousands are still dying each day.

So today we are going to hear four Bible readings, each followed by a short reflection and prayer. They have been chosen to remind us that God walks with us through every part of our lives, including the valley of the shadow of death; that in the darkest times there is still light and hope; that our confidence rests in our faithful and steadfast God; that we are called to live a life based on present and future hope.

The first reading is Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his

name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

There are many images in the Bible of God as a shepherd, and of us as His sheep. To earlier or more rural peoples these images would need no explanation, for sheep and shepherds form part of their lives. To us urban folk, the images seem comforting but we may not know why.

You may have felt 'down cast' during the past year. I know I have at times. The situation has felt overwhelming and for most of us all we could do was wait, often in our homes. To be down cast, or cast down, is actually a term that refers to a sheep in trouble. When a sheep falls over and ends up on its back, it cannot roll itself over. It cannot right itself. So, it will lie in terror, struggling. If the shepherd does not reach it quickly, it will die from the stress. So, when the Bible calls on God to help us when we are cast down it is acknowledging that the Good Shepherd's help is needed desperately to put things right. It is acknowledging we cannot sort this ourselves.

Let us pray.

O God our Good Shepherd,

We are cast down by this pandemic. We are struggling to see how the world can recover. Many people are sick and dying.

Many people have no work or money. We cannot see the will from governments to help one another so that the whole world can be set back on its feet. We are not seeing a fair sharing of vaccines.

Good shepherd, your children throughout the world are downcast. May we all know that you are with us. May we know your comfort. May you restore our souls.

Amen

2 Timothy 4.1-5:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

This letter from Paul was written from captivity as he awaited his death. He urges Timothy to preach the Gospel no matter what. Not to wait for the best time, not to be put off by people's unwillingness to listen, but to do God's work faithfully.

Last week, I went to Deanery Synod and we were asked to consider the way forward out of this situation. We were particularly asked to consider how we could rebuild confidence and hope. Most of us felt that we still had confidence and hope – based on our trust in God; that while we might have lost confidence about going out, about being in crowds, about travel or any number of other things, our confidence in the

Gospel message was undented. We all hoped that, as we returned to our buildings, we would build up both our ministry and our mission.

A recent survey showed that, actually, some of us feel we are coming out of this crisis in better shape than you might imagine. It showed that 2/3 of respondents felt more equipped to face future crises; that there was an increase in family values and community spirit and that 7 in 10 parents said they now felt closer to their children. It hasn't all been unfavourable. But whether the time is favourable or unfavourable, we have a glorious message to share. And in these times, I think we can as churches feel that we have stepped up to support one another and the wider community. We have much that is positive to celebrate from this unfavourable time.

Let us pray.

*God of hope,
We give thanks for all those who have worked so hard throughout this year to support others. We pause to give thanks for individuals, organisations and groups which have helped us in these times.*

Give us the confidence and strength to tell others of you and to share our belief that a life lived with God is a better life. Fill us with your hope as we move into an unknown and unpredictable future, knowing you are ever-present.

Amen

Romans 8.34:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long;

we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nearly 3 million people are known to have died from Covid 19 over the past year; 126,000 of them in the UK. I suspect all of us will know and mourn someone who has died. In the face of such numbers, let us remember that each one was God’s precious child. Each was known and loved by family or friends. Many died well before they might have, if Covid had not taken them. Many died without their hands being held.

During this prayer, we will keep one minute’s silence.

Let us pray.

*Almighty God,
We pray for each and every person who has died this year,
directly or indirectly, from Coronavirus.*

1 minute silence.

*May they rest in peace, and rise in glory.
Amen*

Matthew 6.25-27, 34:

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet

your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?’

‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.’

This year, most of us have learned to appreciate what we had and what we still have. I hope we will never take for granted again our liberty, our leisure pursuits, our meals with wider family, our health. Yet, I guess, in time, all this might become normal again.

Our worries this year have been unrelenting – for ourselves, our loved ones, our country, our neighbours far and wide, our planet. We know, logically, that worrying does not help: that worrying makes things worse, actually. We know, spiritually, that we ought to place our trust in God. But, for many of us, to love is to worry. To care is to worry. We cannot help ourselves.

If one of your worries is about the need to vaccinate across the globe, you might like to consider donating the cost of your vaccine. I donated to [UNICEF](#) but you can donate straight to [WHO](#). That’s a worry which has one practical solution.

Let us pray.

Loving Father,

This year has been a worrying time for us, perhaps the most worrying time we have ever lived through. We have worried for ourselves and been anxious for those we love. We have worried about our neighbours and been anxious that this might never end. Please take that worry from us. Help us rest that burden of anxiety on you.

We pray for all those suffering with poor mental health whatever their age and situation. May they get the help and support they need. Please take their worry and anxiety from them. Give us all relief from this burden.

Amen

Today we pray by name for those we are especially worried about

We commend ourselves, and all those we pray for, to the mercy and protection of God. Amen