

THOUGHTS ON JOYFULNESS

Life at the moment seems to be a little grim. Even the summer seems to have vanished and day after day of dreary, damp, wet, windy and downright chilly days seem to be our lot at the moment. So we can't even BBQ in the garden, enjoy a pleasant summer walk, or sitting outside enjoying the sunshine.

Then there is a nagging doubt among many people that somehow we may never return to life quite as we have previously enjoyed it. How many restrictions and health precautions will we have to continue to take, into an indefinite future? And when will kids be able to behave like kids again, instead of mini adults, forever washing their hands and worrying about Covid 19 and social distance? Many people are still reluctant to consider a holiday, even here in the UK, let alone anywhere else. There are still concerns about places, such as Leicester which is, as I write, back in full lockdown. The pubs might be open, but with so many restrictions that many will decline the pleasure. And if anyone there tests positive for the virus EVERYONE who was there on that occasion will have to quarantine, and the authorities can check up on you, because you will have given your name and contact details before you were able to get served.

There seems to be a general shortage of joy and spontaneity. A trip to a shop has to be planned and we have to wait in queues and the wisdom is we should wear face masks and "sanitise, sanitise, sanitise", which rather takes the fun out of things. For me, I've delayed going into any shop, apart from my local newsagents and a supermarket now and again.

In my gloomier moments I think this all sounds horribly dystopian, we've all read or watched things like Brave New World, 1984, The Handmaid's Tale and so we could be pardoned for thinking that truth is maybe stranger than fiction. Perhaps it is, but doubtless Orwell, Atwood or Aldous Huxley could have a field day with it.

After spending time with these thoughts, I decided it was counter-productive and maybe a little self-indulgent to stay with the gloom. After all I'm a Christian and we are supposed to be people of hope and trust in the ultimate good purposes of God. So what have I done about this?

I started with the idea of "Examen" which is a discipline in which someone reviews the day that has just passed, before going to bed. There is, of course scope for regret, reflection and repentance on where we've fallen short or in what we've left undone, and for bringing painful and needy situations into the loving sight of God. This is very valuable in our spiritual life, but what really spoke to me at this time is the question "where have you found joy today?" and of course to give thanks for it. This set me off on a healthier track.....I would not allow myself to go to bed till I had found at least one thing to be thankful for, and the more I thought about it, the simpler it became. Sometimes a kind word from someone, a beautiful sight or sound, relief at a changed situation, or the knowledge that I've done something well today.

I'll give you a few random things that have brought joy to me over the last few days. Some will resonate with you, but you'll find something else that reveals God's goodness if you allow it. These were for me the stunningly beautiful full moon with silvery clouds a few nights back, hearing a real person play real music on the piano, recalling the best streamed service so far, a fresh Red Admiral butterfly that appeared as if by magic during a brief 5 minutes of sunshine, glistening drops of rain on leaves, a smile from a stranger. Joy is a reminder of God's love and delight in us and all his world, if you look, you will find it.

May the joy of our living Lord be with you all. Alice