COVID-19 chrysalis

In the last week, I’ve heard a couple of people use the phrase ‘when things go back to normal…’ and I’ve asked them what they mean. Will the huge number of unemployed people in Australia quickly find work? Will we be able to fly overseas for work and leisure before Christmas? And, will those aged over 70 and other people deemed ‘high risk’ be able to gather with others again in their communities before a vaccine is developed?

In the Church we can helpfully wonder what the new normal for us will be as restrictions ease, and if there will be a number of stages that need to be worked through! Whatever happens, I don’t think it will be possible for us to go back to being the way we were before and that is both unsettling and exciting.

For while we have been unable to physically gather we have learnt many new things and this includes an increasing capacity to use digital communication technologies for worship, Christian formation, and care of others. Both large and small parishes have found that more people are engaging with what they are offering online than when their churches were open and we can rightly thank God for many emerging opportunities.

An example from the far west of our Diocese is that some congregations well used to the limitations of monthly worship have had new opportunities to go online each week for worship and teaching. This experience has been so positive that many in those congregations have expressed the hope that these online opportunities continue each week in the new normal.

I think it will be helpful to ask important questions in this strange and demanding liminal time. As we care for people who have lost their jobs and are not sure about how to pay their bills. As we support those who are struggling with illness, isolation and grief. And, as we provide worship and formation resources to those who are online and those who have no internet access.

What are the new things we have started that need to continue, and what are the new things we have started that we need to cease? What are the things we used to do that we long to do again, and what are those things that now seem irrelevant or unhelpful?

Having clarity about our core business will help to shape and guide our responses to these questions and I think they are worth taking into prayer and wrestling with.

We know that when a caterpillar wraps itself in a chrysalis it starts to radically change and I wonder if God’s Spirit is enabling radical change in the Church during this time as we stay in our homes as much as possible to keep our communities safe? For in this time we are developing competency with new tools to gather, teach, and build community; new ways of telling stories and creating music; and, new awareness of the digital landscape where many people live and work.
Some years ago, I read an article which suggested that if you cut a chrysalis open to help the emerging butterfly get out easily it will not be able to fly because it is in the process of struggling that the wings get the necessary blood flow to function. I think that's a helpful reminder for us as we work together to create the new normal.

We are to wrestle with the uncomfortable questions and answers, recognising that in the struggle we will in all likelihood find new potential to fly.

What do you think?

Sunday Devotions • Friday 1 May 2020 • By The Rev'd Charlie Lacey

Sunday Devotion: 10 May 2020, Fifth Sunday of Easter

Going against the flow

Main Readings: Acts 7.55-60; Psalm 31.1-5, 17-18; 1 Peter 2.11-25; John 14.1-14

Supplementary Readings: Psalm 116; Revelation 21.1-2, 9-14; Acts 8.1b-13; Psalm 135.1-4,13-21; Revelation 10

"Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’" (John 14.6)

I once hired a tuk-tuk, a kind of automated rickshaw, in New Delhi and spent the first part of the journey travelling the wrong way up a busy main road. It didn't feel very comfortable and was probably quite dangerous!

Jesus said, 'I am the way' and the first Christians were said to belong to ‘the way’. Today's readings make it abundantly clear that ‘the way’ of Jesus goes against the flow of the world. The stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7.55-60), emphasises the level of persecution endured by the early Church, a persecution still experienced by many Christian communities in the world today. From 1 Peter 2 we glean that the early Christians were accused of 'doing wrong'. Indeed, since they had no temples or priests and made no animal sacrifices, they were accused of being godless.

Choosing to go against the flow of the world by following the way of Jesus can be uncomfortable, and in many places it is an extremely dangerous thing to do. Here in Australia we are unlikely to face serious persecution, but we may experience social awkwardness, scathing remarks or even ostracism. However, If we find ourselves counting the cost of going against the flow, today's readings offer tremendous hope. For example, Psalm 31 reminds us that we can “take refuge” in the Lord and that “the Lord preserves the faithful”.

We may be going against the flow by following Jesus' way, but our trajectory is towards God and his eternal kingdom.