

Church Family Newsletter 30th April 2020

Reader Roy Reflects today...

Here we all are – in lock down. This is uncomfortable for many of us. We are cut off from social contact and some of us who live alone are beginning to feel really lonely. We all need meaningful contact with others. Of course, God made us to have relationships. He has placed us in communities and in families. He has given us the family of the church, the community of believers. But it seems clear that in general our community life has deteriorated.

When I was a boy, we knew our neighbours. We would all help each other. Usually the doors were unlocked. We could come and go. Today people often have no idea who their neighbours are. Psychologists tell us that we are happier if we are 'integrated' in a group or other meaningful relationships. We need to belong. It is easy to imagine our cities - full of anonymous individuals coming and going and busy with trains and tubes and people not speaking to each other. What we really don't want is to be left alone.

When I think of the whole scope of the Old Testament, I think of one person, the prophet Elijah, who really expresses this sense of isolation. 1 Kings 19.10 says 'I have been very jealous for the Lord the God of hosts, for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars and slain thy prophets with the sword and I even I only am left and they seek my life to take it away'. Elijah was on his own because his fellow countrymen had rejected God but he was faithful to God. That poignant cry of Elijah 'I even I only am left' is moving. This points us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When it came to it in the Garden of Gethsemane in his hour of trial the disciples all abandoned him. Judas came there with a great crowd from the chief priests and elders with swords and clubs and Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. They laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. The scripture says in Matthew 26.56 'but all this has taken place that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him and fled'. He was left alone. This isolation and this abandonment came to its crisis on the Cross when Jesus uttered the cry of dereliction, 'my God my God why hast thou forsaken me?'

If we go back to the early days we remember the promise given to Israel and which was spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 31.6 'Be strong and of good courage do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you'. It was a promise given before Joshua was about to conquer the promised land. This promise holds fast and is repeated by the writer to the Hebrews in a different context at Hebrews 13.5 which says 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'. The promise is reinforced by Jesus in a dramatic statement before he tells his disciples what will happen after his departure. John 14.18 records the words of Jesus 'I will never leave you desolate. I will come to you'.

As believers, not only do we have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, he has actually made us his friends. John 15.13 tells us 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. We are not on our own and we are never forsaken for 'the Lord your God goes with you'.