

An upside to lockdown



*"The earth is the Lord's,
and everything in it,
the world, and all who
live in it..."
Psalm 24:1-10*

The benefits of a new normal

An upside of lockdown? This is most definitely not a season of business-as-usual for many people. The restrictions being placed upon us are hugely challenging. For many, this Covid-19 pandemic is the worst crisis they have ever had to cope with. And again, we salute and thank all those who are putting themselves at risk to be part of the solution.

One of our coping strategies can be to look for opportunities that we would not ordinarily have and make the most of them until life returns to normal. No doubt many great stories will emerge once the pandemic is over. I would like to offer one up-side for the lockdown if we're prepared to take it.

At this time, we have the space to think seriously about our lives and the way we are treating our world. In particular we have time to reflect on the sustainability of our current lifestyles. There's an expectation (particularly in the more prosperous nations of the world) that we will inevitably continue with our upward march of comfort and convenience and that "new" will always mean "better". This interlude of serious disruption offers us some time

ask ourselves whether this is really true.

The fact is that there are some massive challenges ahead and it will be the next generation, our children and grandchildren, who will confront them. Three of the many are:

- The environment: irreversible damage to our planet
- Our economies: the legacy of huge debt that future generations will inherit from us
- Health: other viral pandemics and antibiotic resistant bacteria

Some years ago, I was part of a church where, for a few weeks, the senior minister developed a teaching series on creation care which promoted the Biblical case for Christians living responsibly as stewards of God's creation. The response was mixed and indeed muted. Some people took on board the issues and began to make adjustments. Others felt that this was a deviation from spiritual 'priorities'. But I think he was right. Is it simply incorrect to believe that God's only concern is with spiritual matters? A balanced reading of scripture shows that God is concerned with our spiritual, physical and material well-being. Is it also accurate to say, as unfortunately some do, that it doesn't really matter how we treat our world because there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth in the future?

The Old Testament prophets spoke messages that both called for change and held out the hope of future blessing. It would be a positive response to the former that paved the way for the latter. And the prophets tended to get to the root of the problem as well as speaking out on symptoms.

Were those prophets with us today, they would most certainly have something to say to us. What, in particular would they say? I'd suggest that they would take us to task for thinking that this world in which we live belongs to us and is ours to exploit. The sober truth is that it belongs to God and is ours to steward.

Underpinning the first way of thinking is the widespread conviction that we humans can solve all our own problems and be masters of our own destinies and that we don't need God. Well, for some months, an invisible microscopic strand of RNA wrapped in a coat of protein is challenging our finest minds – scientists, politicians, economists and the population of the world at large. Yet it is also providing us with an

opportunity ask whether we really do need more of God in our thinking, to set our bearings, order our priorities and give us the help we need not just for our own sake, but for our children and our children's children.

A prayer:

When we do return to normal, may it be a new-normal, a normal where we recognise our place in God's world and all that flows from that.

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