



## LOOSENING LOCKDOWN

### A PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP GREGORY for Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2020

I think that we've all been surprised by the lockdown. When it began in mid-March, we were uncertain how long it would last, but it looked like a period of time with a definite start and a definite finish. One day the danger of the virus would be past, and we would resume life. Now we're learning that the lockdown is going to be lifted step by step – rather like treading one's way across a treacherous frozen lake, we're having to test the ice ahead to see if it will bear us - whether this step can be taken safely, or whether we shall have to retreat if the virus surges once again.

So the rules change; in England one day the schools are returning, the next day they're not. The rules in Wales are different from the rules in England. Is it two metres distance we must maintain, or one plus? One plus what? We can travel five miles - or more, if there's good reason, but what would a good reason look like? Garden centres were amongst the first to open, barbers and hairdressers are taking bookings, but can they open yet? I must admit I've begun to get confused.

Even the rules for the churches are changing frequently. One week we're open for private prayer, but it looks as if the resumption of weddings are on their way, and new announcements are in the pipeline. The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist in our local churches for all God's people seems a way off yet however.

We're going to have to learn the rules of loosening lockdown, and live by them. However, the situation has become complicated, and the united front of commitment and resilience is under pressure. The beaches have become too appealing for some, the chance to renew friendships is too attractive for others, and yet many, if not most have become more cautious, we've learned to dance around the supermarket, weaving to preserve the two metre rule.

What are the loosening lockdown rules of faith that apply in these times? How does God call upon to relate to one another? Here are just three that are close to the top of my list.

**Compassion.** I've written before about the way in which we've put the vulnerable in the centre of our society at this time. Our churches have done humble but important things well in these days – checking up on the shielded, delivering medicines, cooking

and delivering meals, ensuring support. As we loosen lockdown, how can we remain compassionate, and as the business of life resumes, how do we find the space for others? “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”, said Jesus (Luke 6.36), and this is one of the chief marks of a loving Christian community.

**Collaboration.** One of the phrases I’ve heard frequently is that “We’re in this together”, but it has, it seems to me, become far more than words. We’ve been learning to co-operate. The things that we’ve done, the things that we’ve achieved, have often been because, like the Body of Christ, we’ve acted as a body. Too often we can make Christianity a religion of private faith: my prayers, my faith, my salvation. Yet there’s always a corporate dimension – it is when two or three are gathered that Christ is among us, and together we can do more. I hope that we’ll invest in the Church, as lockdown loosens. “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2.22) What a vision for the Teulu Asaph, that God should at home among us.

**Courage.** I’ve been amazed by the way that the Church family has been bold in facing the future. We’ve not put off decisions on finance, co-operation and evangelism. We’ve not abandoned worship or mission, as if these can wait for the future. And this commitment must continue, indeed, this must be accelerated as the lockdown loosens: what new things is Christ calling us to? “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed” God urged Joshua as he took over from Moses (Joshua 1.9), and I am sure that God speaks the same words to us today.

These are big words – and yet I think it’s fair to say that they have already been true of us over the last three months. May they also be watchwords for our future: rules for loosening lockdown, and being faithful to Christ.

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