



GOING OUT WITH JOY

A Pastoral Letter to the Teulu Asaph from Bishop Gregory

Thursday, 30th July, 2020

How are you facing the prospect of the easing of lockdown? My sense is that there's a real mixture of feelings – there is excitement for some; certainly going to the ordination a few weeks ago, and to a live licensing last Sunday brought for me a sense of real excitement and even joy to be going into Church again. On the other hand, many are extremely nervous of re-forging links, of actually being in the presence of others, and facemasks and sanitizer are the hallmarks of a new caution that will be part of our lives for some considerable time yet.

I am sure that the Spirit of God is seeking to encourage us, however. The sovereignty of God is exercised, in my opinion, not by making us marionettes, and by dictating every success or failure, every good thing and bad occurrence, but by moving among us to bring life out of death, light out of darkness, hope out of fear, and strength out of weakness. God works always towards the healing and wholeness of creation. And he invites us to get caught up in that movement, to join with him as life givers, light bringers, hope imparters, strength builders. “In this world you will have tribulation.” said Jesus, “But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16.33).

So God invites you and I, at this time of the easing of lockdown, to be bold in rebuilding society and lifting up those who have been cast down. This is the work of the Kingdom. It is not being foolhardy: there are risks, and we should follow best practice, and we must be sober in our judgment of how we stay safe. Nonetheless, the chief thought and intention in our minds at this time must be “What can I contribute to the greater good? How can I be an ambassador of the healing power of Christ to my neighbour at a time like this?” The cross of Jesus Christ is the mark that God bears our pain in his heart, and that by his death and burial, Jesus buries our sin and failure, our fear and our anxiety. His resurrection is the mark of the way in which God will put the possibility of new life and new expressions of love in our way, and we must claim the opportunities he gives us.

“You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace” (Isaiah 55.12) was the promise of God to the nation of Israel when they were coming out of the lockdown of exile and despair in their own national life, and I don’t think it is too farfetched to believe that God would have us face the future in a similar spirit. We must dig deep into our spiritual resources to discover again that we are bearers of joy, which is the secret joy planted in our hearts when we catch sight of what the fullness of God’s Kingdom can be like. We must go forth to be peacemakers, having discovered afresh the peace which God imparts to his children, and which becomes manifest when we build up others by loving service, and by acting as healers of division and brokenness.

If our faith means anything, Christians must be at the forefront of creating a new society in which reconciliation, peace and justice can come to fruition. At the end of the Gospels, the disciples come across as quite disoriented, and unsure what to do next. As we come, blinking, into contact with society once again, we are not unlike them. Jesus gave the disciples a gentle push (perhaps not so gentle actually) – “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16.15 – from the longer, possible additional, ending of the Gospel according to Mark, although all the Gospels have a similar sending) How can the Teulu Asaph be good news to the people of north east and central Wales? Of one thing then we can be certain, Jesus is prompting us forward to be his agents of hope and new life.

This will be the last of my weekly pastoral letters for now. I am taking a break in August, and hope perhaps to start monthly pastoral letters on a permanent basis in the Autumn. I’m enormously grateful for the positive feedback and encouragement I’ve received. May God bless you greatly, your going out and your coming in,

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