

Last week I had a call from my neighbour opposite to check that I was OK. It was 8 o'clock in the morning and she was worried that something might be wrong. The reason for the call was because my dog was not sitting in the front room window as she always is at that particular time and she was worried that something might have happened to me (or the dog)!

Betsey is quite a big dog and sits along the windowsill taking up a fair amount of room. It is not unusual for people, particularly those with children, to stop and look and sometimes, to wave as they are passing. She is almost a local attraction and I am often greeted as the lady with the dog, in the shops at the bottom of the road. And, Betsey just sits there and takes it as her due.

One of the most important effects of the lockdown has been the way that people actually talk to each other and look out for each other.

I have been very fortunate in the numbers of ways people have reached out to me during these past weeks, like my neighbour. As I have been self-isolating it is the small things which have meant so much: the local grocer who has been keeping me well-fed throughout these last 3 months and the greengrocer offering a similar delivery service. The friend who takes my dog for long walks at the weekend and has often arrived with fish and chips or cake for me. The fellowship of neighbours as we watch out for each other. The friend from Bovingdon who travelled to me last Sunday, just to give me a cupcake for the service. It has been truly humbling.

Recently though, the news has changed dramatically. We no longer watch Captain Tom, or Sir Tom as we should now call him, completing his challenge of a marathon 100 walks around his garden. We no longer think of the incredible amount of money he raised from so many generous people. Instead the news has been filled with injustice and hate. It no longer shows the work of the Doctors and Nurses combatting this terrible plague. Instead we have pictures of people fighting to get into a newly opened shop; of racial prejudice; of the desecration of monuments and memorials; of rioting, criminal disorder and a complete absence of compassion for one another.

In the gospel reading today, Jesus is giving future instructions to his disciples. He gives them the authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. He tells them not to be afraid. He uses these memorable words, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, Are not two

sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are numbered. So, don't be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows." These are, indeed, comfortable words; words that are particularly appropriate, at this time.

Jesus continues, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." These words are not just for his disciples who were with him, but for all who believe. They are words for us, now.

Jesus is the Lord and judge of the world. When everything is dark, confused and difficult to understand, it is through faith in his love that we find hope and comfort and through commitment to his word that we will pass through these dark and difficult times.

As we will sing, with faith, in our song: "Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store; take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee." Amen