



Dear Friends

Again, Felicity and I hope that you are keeping well...

Unfortunately, we are been encouraged not to open the Church and SSC for the next few weeks. The lockdown (or whatever one calls it) has been extended to all people being restricted to staying at home over the next month or so. Hopefully you are keeping to these guidelines, and if you need to self-isolate then you are doing so please. As we said last week, these are unprecedented times in our nation, unheard of in fact and we all need to do our part to try and stop this virus from spreading.

Needless to say, we are still operating and functioning as a church fellowship, *as the church is the people not the buildings*. We aim to contact each of you at least once a week, and if you need to speak to us then ring us please.

From a spiritual perspective: May I offer some thoughts over leaf.



Put your clocks forward this weekend too!

Ten Radio: If you are able to receive 10 Radio then there will be a new regular church service at 10am each Sunday morning. It is Felicity and I this week, and we plan to do a pre-record for broadcast on Sunday morning. (Also, on Alexa)

As I quoted on my Facebook page: **'This is a temporary storm that will indeed blow over, and it will usher in a coming move of God. Let's take hold of God in the midst of this crisis, and let's shine like lights in a dark and frightened world.'**

Please use Sunday morning as your time of personal worship prayer and reflection. It would be so easy to replace that time with God by doing something else, gardening, washing whatever. Be assured of our prayers at this time. **Be people of faith not fear.** We will get through this.

Blessings:

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Jeremiah 18:1-11

In the finance world there is an event called the Black Swan Event. The black swan theory (or theory of black swan events) is a metaphor that describes an event that comes as a surprise, has a major effect, and is often inappropriately rationalised after the fact with the benefit of hindsight.

The term is based on an ancient saying that presumed black swans did not exist – a saying that became reinterpreted to teach a different lesson after black swans were discovered in

the wild. These events may include:

An event that is unpredictable.

An event results in severe and widespread consequences.

After the occurrence of a black swan event, people will rationalize the event as having been predictable (known as the hindsight bias).

No doubt in that context the current world situation is a Black Swan Event.

As a whole, people have tremendous faith in medical science to cure any illness. Perhaps we would readily acknowledge that the advances made in healthcare are astonishing, but it remains something of an art. It still requires imagination, guesswork, trial and error methods. Medical experts aren't always confident about what they're doing and even the layman can see it's a risky business, and there are no guarantees it can always help us.

Yet because we have such high expectations, we tend to overuse it. Physicians say large portions of the people they see do not actually need a doctor. They suffer from an ailment that could just as easily be served with a little rest and self-tender love and care, and not a prescription. So much medicine is dispensed for psychological reasons rather than an actual physical sickness. Millions and millions of pounds are spent by people who have come to believe that a pill can relieve almost anything.

My point is this. We should affirm the value of the healing arts as a gift from God. Indeed, there is much that medicine can do for us. Still, it has its limits. Its practitioners are not gods but are fallible human beings like the rest of us. *People with faith in the Lord of creation; know it is only God who is never in error.* Only God is ever in complete control. And although we would not readily dismiss the blessings of medical research and practice, only God truly has the power to heal.

So, how might this relate to the current coronavirus pandemic? There are several ways, but for now, let's stick to the spiritual. Health experts are working around the clock to contain the virus and to find a vaccine. Things appear promising. And yet...the virus could mutate into something more infectious and lethal. Infections could spread beyond the capacity to handle despite the medical community's best efforts. Other variables include the severe weakening of our economy, which could not only leave us with hospitals overflowing with the ill, but our streets filled with the hungry and homeless.

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Only God knows, and ultimately our plight is in his hands, not the doctors and medical scientists that are seeking to provide a solution.

Neither can the government save us. Governments like medical science are meant to serve us, but government must always be eyed with a healthy dose of scepticism, especially in an hour of crisis. Governments have a penchant for capitalizing on crises as a means of extending their powers and reducing our liberties.

These words should not generate panic but are meant to precipitate deep contemplation. Their purpose is simply to declare unequivocally that our hope is in God. They are meant to say that God, in His all-wise providence has allowed this moment to serve His purposes, one of which is to remind us of our profound vulnerabilities and desperate need of Him.

It's a point of tremendous consternation for some people that God would be at the heart of a catastrophe. It is, however, a jagged reality pill that must be taken if we would be spiritually healthy. Yes, God may use trouble to send a message, to make us reflect, to cause us to take introspection, to change our direction, and reshape our persons. *How we respond to Him can make the difference.*

In **Jeremiah 18:1-11**, the Bible says the prophet Jeremiah observed a potter working at his wheel. Jeremiah said he saw that people are like clay in God's hands. If God sees their lives marred by rebellion towards Him, He reserves the right to break the vessel down and rework it.

Jeremiah said if the Lord declares judgment on a nation and that nation turns from its evil, the Lord can avert the disaster heading their way. If they ignore God and refuse to start living right, then God won't oblige himself to help them at all.

The story of the potter and his wheel illustrates a double freedom that can only be exercised within a specific window of time. **People have the freedom to respond to God's sovereign plans, and God has the freedom to change his plans in the context of their timely response.**

During these recent uncertain days, much has been said about the choice between fear and faith. But an equally important message may be the choice between repentance and ruin. When we have operated throughout our lives, individually and corporately, without the appropriate recognition of God, his grace and mercies, then tragedy asks us, like prodigals to return home to a loving and benevolent Heavenly Father, lest our lot become worse.

Perhaps what the world needs is an 'Emergency Boss – an Emergency Czar – an Emergency Commander – a true Master of Disaster – one person completely responsible for the anticipation, immediate reconnaissance, and urgent execution of rescue and relief efforts around the world'.

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There is only one person, one entity that fits this role – not medical research – not the government – not anyone else – **but only God**. That's the message that may be lost and overlooked in the COVID-19 health pandemic.

Let's face it; even if the coronavirus doesn't get worse and the danger passes swiftly, everyone who is outside of saving faith in Jesus Christ is facing an incomparable disaster – the loss of their soul.

Jonathan Edwards, the Congregationalist Protestant theologian of the 17th Century, said that every person without Christ "hangs by a slender thread" over the pit of hell, "with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder."

Without Christ, said Edwards, they have nothing of their own making to save them, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, and nothing that they can do to induce God to spare them. If God is ignored past the opportunity of his gracious offer to repent and be saved, everything is lost – lost forever.

Could you be missing the message highlighted by COVID-19? Is the message lost to the UK? Is it lost to much of the world?

Emergencies, traumas, challenging and impassable predicaments, (Black Swan Events) can serve as powerful dispatches of God's authority over us.

God alone is in control.

God alone is our hope.

God alone is the source of healing.

God alone can save.

God alone can make the injustice right.

God alone can turn the tragic around.

We don't just need God in times of trouble, but every single moment of every single day. And we can't just keep thumbing our nose at God and expect Him to be there for us when we're in distress.

What do you need to decide? Do you recognize, perhaps now more than ever, your need of God? Do you need to repent of your sins and turn to Christ?

Please keep well...

Martyn

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On a lighter note: (from an American Friend)

Dear Grandson... The other day I went up to our local Christian bookstore and saw a "honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker. I was feeling particularly cheeky that day because I had just come from a thrilling choir performance, followed by a thunderous prayer meeting. So, I bought the sticker and put it on my bumper.

Boy, I'm glad I did, what an uplifting experience that followed. I was stopped at a red light at a busy intersection, just lost in thought about the Lord and how good he is, and I didn't notice that the light had changed. It is a good thing someone else loves Jesus because if he hadn't honked, I'd never have noticed.

I found that lots of people love Jesus!

Why, while I was sitting there, the guy behind started honking like crazy, and then he leaned out of his window and screamed, "For the love of God! Go! Go! Go! Jesus Christ Go!" What an exuberant cheerleader he was for Jesus! Everyone started honking! I just leaned out my window and I started waving and smiling at all those loving people. I even honked my horn a few times to share in the love!

There must have been a man from Florida back there because I heard him yelling something about a "sunny beach".

I saw another guy waving in a funny way...with only his middle finger stuck up in the air. I asked my teenage grandson in the back seat what that meant. He said it was probably a Hawaiian good luck sign or something.

Well, I've never met anyone from Hawaii, so I leaned out the window and gave him the good luck sign back.

My grandson burst out laughing...why, even he was enjoying this religious experience!

A couple of the people were so caught up in the joy of the moment that they got out of their cars and started walking towards me. I bet they wanted to pray or ask what church I attended, but this is when I noticed the light had changed.

So, I waved at all my brothers and sisters grinning, and drove on through the intersection.

I noticed I was the only car that got through the intersection before the light changed again and felt kind of sad that I had to leave them after all the love we had shared.

So, I slowed the car down, leaned out the window and gave them all the Hawaiian good luck sign one last time as I drove away.

Praise the Lord for such wonderful folks!!

Will write again soon.

Love: Granddad