

Liturgy in a Dangerous Time



(Tim Watson)

#3

Sunday 3 May 2020



(© Mark Kensett)

We have all known the long loneliness
and we have learned that the only
solution is love and that love comes with
community.

(Dorothy Day: "The Long Loneliness")

An opening

Into the depths,
And out of mine.
Is where I want to go
Eventually at least.
Step by step, like a Pilgrim.

If there is indeed a war to be waged,
Let it be against that old enemy,
The giant Despair,
And his grievous crab tree cudgel.

May these lonely times
Sharpen our focus
And strengthen our resolve.
That we may emerge
Ready to play our part.

A video

You might want to put your
headphones on for this – and put the
video on as big a screen as you can.

[\(Click here to watch the video\)](#)

[\(Miranda Stone and Chris Hale\)](#)

A practise

Call to mind something for which you
are grateful. Let it roll around your
mind for a minute or two, look at the
corners and edges of it, re-member it
and re-call it.

If you are with others or just one
other, then share your gratitude if you
feel able. Respect those who need to
keep their gratitude quiet – precious
things can be fragile.

A version

The Lord is my key worker, I shall
not want for essential supplies.

He makes me lie down in clean
pastures; with beds scrubbed,
protected eyes smiling;

She leads me beside still waters, down
empty rainbow'd streets;

They restores my dignity, and my
soul.

Even though I walk, sit, am wheeled
through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil of abandonment or
complacency

for you are with me;
your truck, and your mop, and your
gloved hand –
they comfort me.
You prepare a takeaway box before
me
in the presence of those who
disparage you;
you anoint my head with a fresh
shampoo, my body with new sewn
scrubs;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me
all the days of my life
and I shall dwell in the warehouse, in
the care home, in the hospice of the
Lord my whole life long.

[\(Alice Watson\)](#)



[\(Photo by Daniel von Appen on Unsplash\)](#)

A thought

Watch and listen to this short thought
from Andy Campbell.

[\(Click here to watch the video\)](#)

Questions:

Who are 'kindred' to you now?

Who are the people who need
support and aren't getting it?

[\(Andy Campbell\)](#)

A pause

Take a moment, and be still and
silent.

••••

Notice what thoughts are in your
mind, *recognise and accept* them.

Don't engage with them, just
recognise and accept them for what
they are. Good and bad.

••••

Take a moment to be thankful for the
time and space to be aware.

A song

Rest Assured (Arms of love)

[\(Click here to see the video\)](#)

I'm rest assured in this truth - God is able

I'm rest assured in the knowledge of him

I'm rest assured there is no greater comfort

I'm rest assured in the shadow of this wings

(Chorus)

In the arms of love

The arms that hold me up

I will not fear what's to come

Here in the arms of love

I'm rest assured in the hope god is mighty

I'm rest assured in his goodness and truth

I'm rest assured there is no greater power

I'm rest assured in the strength of him

Chorus

I'm rest assured in the promise of Jesus

I'm rest assured that there is no greater love

I'm rest assured he laid his life down to save us

I'm rest assured in the grace that he gives

Chorus

You are the breath I breathe

You are the bread I eat

You quench the thirst within me

My source, my healer, everything

(Rpt.)

You're in the arms of love

His arms will hold you up

So don't not fear things to come

You're in the arms of love

You are the breath I breathe

You are the bread I eat

You quench the thirst within me

My source, my healer, everything

(Kerry and Ian Harris)

An activity

In a space that you are used to, (front room, garden, kitchen...) look around you carefully. What do you see? The familiar things that you are so used to seeing, day after day? Focus on a few of the most familiar items, ornaments, pieces of furniture, books or toys, plants or pots perhaps. Now slowly, carefully, choose one, and examine it – look at it first, taking time to focus in, to see it again. Look for the hidden imperfections, marks, dents, scratches and little areas of wear and tear.

When you have finished looking, close your eyes and use your sense of touch to do the same thing – feeling for patches of roughness, smoothness, jaggedness...

Repeat the exercise again using your sense of smell – and even, if it's appropriate, your sense of taste. Tap the item gently, or shake it, and see what sounds it makes.

Use all of your senses to re-engage with this familiar thing, this piece of

your life which is so generally unremarkable.

Focus all of your attention on it, and take time to do so, our lives are often so cluttered and full that we move from one thing to another without ever taking the time to appreciate the beauty and fullness of small things.



(Photo by [Carolyn V](#) on [Unsplash](#))

If you find there is nothing around you that you can do this with, try using a cup of tea. Focus first on the process of making then of drinking the tea – work hard to notice everything about it, the smells and the sensations, the way the tannins mix and swirl, the feel of the cup against your hand and against your lip.

Find a way of expressing your gratitude to the divine for these simple, so often overlooked, things.



(Photo by [Daan Stevens](#) on [Unsplash](#))

A poem

John 11:21/ April 2020

She says

If you'd been here

at the time we needed you, said the
right words,

brought all the right equipment,
brought the show to town

my brother

my little brother, and I know he was
a vulnerable case, they'd said so for
years, but still, my brother

would not have died

and I thought you loved him

I thought you'd got this covered

I trusted you

and he might have said

you know I can't be everywhere

I can't cure everyone

and I'm already carrying

enough and more burdens

always on the edge of tears

(you don't know it yet

but this sickness has me caught)

but she's had it with caring

and with nobody caring

and her sister's in the house, hasn't
got up for days, and the folk in the
village are saying

poor Martha, she did so well all this
time, held it together, she's amazing

really, with the brother and all, but in
the end, in a crisis

what can you do, you lose some
but she's tough she'll get through it

she doesn't need more public
information doesn't need a sermon

she knows what's happening but it's
the grief talking

she needs someone to understand she
won't get through it

this is the point where she lets herself
break

and he says

believe me

you can let yourself break.

She says

I believe you

I believe you always

*just don't come back without my brother
Lazarus*

don't even think about cutting my losses

if he's left behind I don't want to know

I've had it with hope that calls for sacrifice

and don't get me wrong

there's a party all ready

I've set the table I've told Mary get up

we're expecting everyone

you can't let me down

and he says, don't worry

this might take some time

but you'll see us all there.

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[\(Ben Wildflower\)](#)

A reading

Psalm 23

[\(click here to see a version\)](#)



[\(Photo by Meneya on Morquefile\)](#)

A prayer

Good Shepherd,

We do not know what will happen
when you open the gate,

Call us out – (to join you) -

And say, Follow Me, in this same but
new place.

We do not know how we will feel
when we see who we have lost,

And we have to go on.

We do not know yet when, how, or
what this will be;

What beyond the sheep pen looks like
on that day.

We do not know if we will truly
believe in the good pasture,
or the abundant life -

But we will try to believe it. If not we
will try to try.

For you go before us, Good
Shepherd,

And you understand if we cling to
your rod and your staff,

Or if we don't.

We pray that in whatever way,
however big or small,

You may make yourselves known to
us that we may ever keep our eyes set
on you,

As you step and we do our best to
follow.

Amen.

[\(Danny Pegg\)](#)

A reflection

Lately, when I ring people, often self-isolating at home, to see how they are, or when my colleagues do, we ask them if they're lonely. 'Oh no dear', they might reply, 'more people than ever before are calling me, the family call every day, neighbours check in, as well as the church'. It's truly to be praised how much people are looking out for others in these pandemic days. It's truly damning perhaps, how little they did before. It has taken this, this global shake-up, this resetting of priorities and consciousness, to open our eyes to those around us who might be lonely or alone. Or at least some of them.

And yet, I wonder, are we really being truthful with each other, are we still afraid or reticent to say those two little words: 'I'm lonely' – held back perhaps by some ideal of a national characteristic, some Blitz-spirit, upper lip which holds in how we truly feel. Or perhaps we just don't want to burden others. Offering some of our

soul to others invites them to share a part of it.

Perhaps it's no wonder we might feel like this – a quick google preparing to write this – “a Christian theology of loneliness” immediately reinforces that if you're lonely, you're doing something wrong – *'ask yourself if you have taken possession of the abundant life God wants you to have'*. I can't even begin to unpack this, loneliness as separation from God, as failure to live out the life God desires for you....? Yet loneliness is not sin, but sorrow. A sorrow that all of us must collectively bear – there are far too many lonely people in our society.

As much as phone-calls, and zoom, and photos or letters help to relieve some of my own loneliness at this strange time, nothing replaces being with people, gathering, the touch of a loved one, the way laughter sparks electricity like around a room, how held-in, held-between grief can explode, release, with a touch of hand on shoulder. At the centre of the Gospel is corporeality, God leaving



(Photo by [Matt Sclarandis](#) on [Unsplash](#))

the heavens to embrace us in our own messed up, fragile world of touch and taste and smell. God is a God who, in Jesus Christ, pitched His own tent in our own flesh. Our physical needs for touch and connection, therefore, are hallowed and important – it is right that we should be alongside each other, as God is alongside us. What greater love therefore, can anyone have, than to set that aside, in order to keep others safe?

So loneliness therefore, at least to me, has a physical as well as a cognitive or

emotional aspect. I remember the first few days after I had given birth, in a swirling mess of disaster, mess, and miracle, feeling intensely lonely, feeling as though my own body was incomplete. That that two-in-one connection was now broken, two lives forever separated. My mind knew how entangled and entwined we would always be, yet my body missed the indwelling intimacy.

And yet, as so many know, it is possible to be deeply lonely surrounded by others; physical touch

can often be a mere necessity, a cause of panic, or dangerously unwanted. We can long for peace, for safety, for space for our own thoughts to unravel. And in this pandemic, even the kindest touch often holds fear as well comfort. So perhaps there is something which links all of these; which allows some to not know loneliness, even after months of solitude, and others to ache in the midst of a crowd. Perhaps it is what this pandemic might have taken from us, that sense of ease, replaced by a fundamental dis-ease.

It is this settling, this ease, to relax or to enliven which is my own personal antidote to loneliness. I find myself returning over and over to these words of Mary Oliver, in her poem *Loneliness* –

*I too have known what it is to feel
misunderstood,
rejected, and suddenly
not at all beautiful.*

Our lonely lives lack beauty, they lack the mirror which shows us as we are too – beautiful. Loneliness smudges and fractures that glass which shows us as the image of God, divinely wonderful. Eventually it removes the glass altogether. So in these times, I pray for light-bearers, mirror-shiners, for heralds of beautiful tidings, small gestures, ongoing phone-calls, waves where there can't be touch. And I pray for a sense of God's ease in our lives, of the abundant outpouring of rest that God offers, and that so many bring into these strange and distant times.

For those whose loneliness is a temporary pain, I give thanks for all that so many are giving up for our communal safety. And for those for whom it feels like a permanent state of being, I pray that our prised-open eyes may remain so, and that we may all seek connection with those who need it most.

[\(Alice Watson\)](#)

A reading

John 10 1-10

[\(click here to see a version\)](#)

A poem

I am the gate

Follow me, you know my voice

Live fully with me

[\(Emma Major\)](#)

A closing

“This, then, is our desert: to live facing despair, but not to consent. To trample it down under hope in the Cross. To wage war against despair unceasingly.”

(Thomas Merton – Thoughts in Solitude)

This liturgy has been compiled by Andy and Simon and features contributions from:

Andy Campbell (poet & life coach), Simon Cross (writer); Chris Hale (musician); Kerry and Ian Harris (young family worshipping God in lockdown); Mark Kensett (photographer); Emma Major (lay pioneer minister & poet); Rachel Muers (quaker theologian, mother, teacher); Danny Pegg (priest, curate, playwright, nerd); Miranda Stone (musician); Alice Watson (deacon & “wannabe writer”); Tim Watson (priest, illustrator & poet) & Ben Wildflower (artist).

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