

# Liturgy in a Dangerous Time

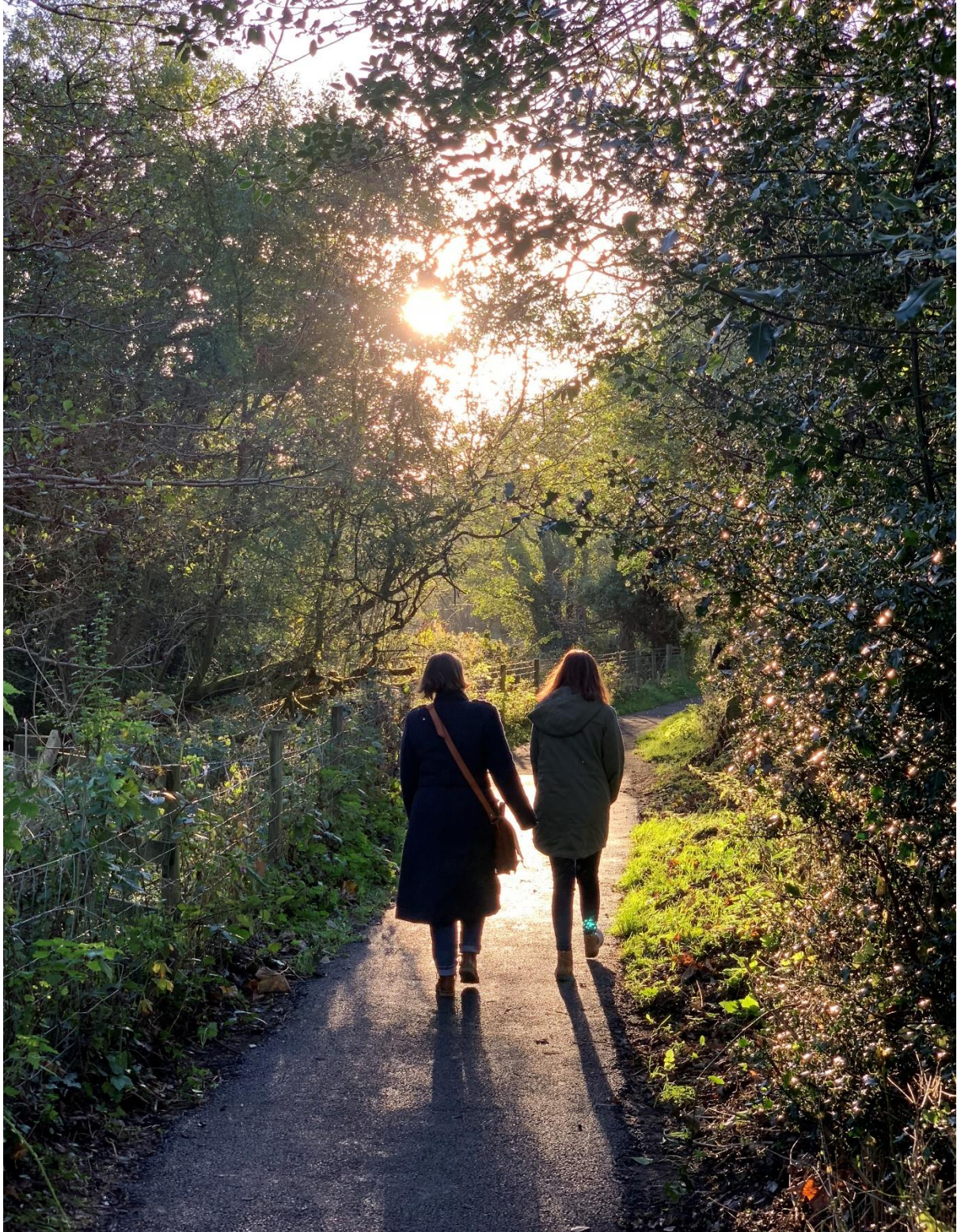


*(Tim Watson)*

## #6

*simonjcross.com/dangerous-liturgy*

# Sunday 24 May 2020



(Mark Kensett)

## **Covid death // Deuteronomy 33:27**

[Click here to listen to & watch it.](#)

He fell into the arms of those he called  
Who came no further than his opened door –  
And he was young, just twenty, his appalled  
And frightened neighbour softly said. (The raw  
Shock shook his voice.) He fell into their arms  
And died. Just died, right there and then. His name,  
I heard, was Alec. He's dead. He did no harm.  
Worked at the hospital. A crying shame.

What succour when the cords of purpose slip?  
What meaning when the budding branches die?  
The flimsy fabric of our pageant rips  
And fall we all into - whose arms? Do I  
Still dare to hope that under, through, above  
The universe, the wheeling world, is love?

[\*\(James Stacey\)\*](#)

## An opening

Hope grows up through the cracks of our well paved lives. Despite the odds, hope still thrives.

Stones go askew, and concrete cracks. Where it finds a weak point, hope attacks. Persistently.

## A practise

Find a space to be still.  
Be quiet, close your eyes.

### **Breathe.**

Become aware of the thoughts that are crowding your mind. Recognise them, accept them, don't judge them.

### **Breathe.**

Be conscious of those thoughts that worry you.

### **Breathe.**

Be conscious of those thoughts that give you hope.

### **Breathe.**

Open your eyes, and find something to write on. Write down your hopes.

## A prayer

May hope dwell long in our hearts.

May love fill our minds.

May kindness spill from our mouths.

May generosity tumble from our hands.

In the name of the infinite well of love. Amen



*(Ben Wildflower)*

## A verse

But let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 5:24

## A reimagining

The philosopher and literary critic, Frederic Jameson spoke about the ‘utopian potential in catastrophic movies’, noting that something interesting occurs with great regularity in those films about some catastrophic event which threatens to destroy the world-films like Independence Day or Armageddon-blockbuster movies filled with huge special effects and A-list actors bent on saving the planet from whatever threatens it. Jameson said that more often than not what happens in the film is that people lay aside their small, and even larger, differences and work together to defeat a common enemy, and to make the world safe again and along the way they discover other ways of living with each other-often deeper, more thoughtful, generous and inclusive ways. This is the utopian potential buried in catastrophe that Jameson invites us to think about-the strange and perhaps rather sad notion that it often takes catastrophe to bring out the best in us

in order to make the world a better place. Hollywood blockbusters are one thing, but right now we find ourselves living in a real catastrophe of global proportion, are the utopian potentials to be found in this situation? I think so, and it will take exactly what it takes in a movie, people being willing to lay aside differences, come together and do what is necessary to make the world a better place.



*(Billie Sylvain)*

The idea of utopia is often dismissed, largely, I think, because it is usually presented as some futuristic, perfect

and unattainable ideal, but that is not what utopia really is. It is seldom just a form of escapism that wants to deny all negativity in favour of some perfect future. Instead, utopia is the imagining of alternative ways of being and a highlighting of what needs to be overcome. In order to achieve that. Jameson put it this way, “Utopia is not a positive vision of the future so much as it is a negative judgement of the present.”

The world as we have known and largely accepted it, has ground to a halt, and it is going to take Herculean effort from all of us to find our way through the present catastrophe. Many simply want to get back to normal, to have things go back to the way they were before lockdown, but the utopian potential in all of this invites otherwise-to see what is glaringly not right about the necessary worlds we lived in before Covid-19 and to work towards possible futures that require a different way of living with and for each other.

[\(Barry Taylor\)](#)



[\(Tim Watson\)](#)

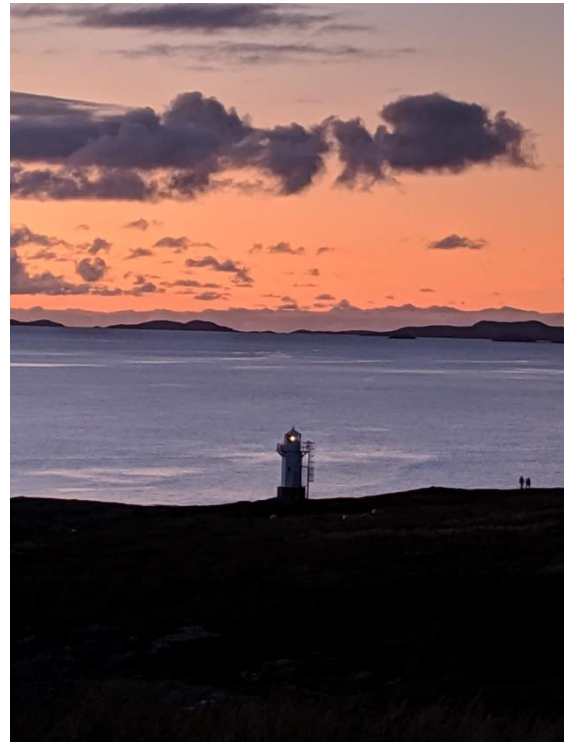
## A reminder

### Liturgy has always been Dangerous

Both the Old and New Testament are bursting with dangerous liturgy. Jesus and Paul both played with the violent political idea of ‘Parousia’ or arrival or ‘second coming’ of the Lord. For Jesus it was played out in the journey we mark on Palm Sunday with Jesus’ liturgical arrival into Jerusalem, contrasting sharply – and mockingly with Pilate’s arrival at the other side of the city with great and threatening pomp; in Greek this was Pilate’s ‘Parousia’.

Parousia One of Paul’s favourite words it usually means ‘return of a victorious military ruler’, and it marries with another word, *apantesis*, which often means ‘meeting with a returning dignitary’. The following quotes from the first letter to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians illustrate this well (*italics mine*): ‘Christ the first fruits, then at his *return* those who belong to Christ’ (1

Corinthians 15:23) and ‘Then we ... will be caught up in the clouds together with them to *meet* the Lord in the air’ (1 Thessalonians 4:17).



[\(Liz Chart\)](#)

When Rome went out to war and pacified another people group, it felt the need to parade that victory to its own citizens back in Rome. The spoils of war – people, animals, and material goods – would be marched through the city. The crowds would gather, cheer, and throw rotten food and stones at the new slaves, and everyone would be reminded of how great and blessed the Peace of Rome

was. This was an awesome and terrible sight and different from Jesus' provocative return to Jerusalem on a donkey, waved in with palm branches and cloaks. Paul then, perhaps familiar with the story of Jesus' 'Palm Sunday', takes this language and applies it directly to Jesus: in contrast and defiance to the Roman Peace he places the Peace of Jesus, one that involves forgiveness and restoration rather than pacification and theft.

If we follow the example of Jesus and Paul we take the propaganda of the state and turn it into liturgies of resistance.

*[\(Keith Hebdon\)](#)*

## A song

Spend some time with this lockdown version of 'Because He Lives' by Robb and Ruth Sutherland – featuring Bailey on vocals.

[Click here to watch & listen.](#)

*[\(Robb Sutherland & Ruth Sutherland\)](#)*

## A conversation

Over a bit of a dodgy zoom line, I had a conversation with theologian and academic Roger Mitchell about the opportunities he sees ahead of us, after the lockdown finishes.

[You can listen to it here.](#)

*[\(Roger Mitchell\)](#)*



*[\(Liz Chart\)](#)*





## A reflection

(Photo by [Adam Nieścioruk](#) on [Unsplash](#))

### A privileged pandemic

*'When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person.'*

Luke 48:12

I have lived with privilege throughout my life. I am white and middle class and grew up in a loving family. I lived in a pleasant suburban neighbourhood, attending two excellent schools. After a year living in a L'Arche community, I went to a

good university and have had further opportunities to study since then.

Apart from a short period staying at home when my children were small, I've been in regular employment all my adult life. Since my 30's, I've had interesting work that has paid a decent wage. I am happily married, in good health, have a lovely home and enough to eat.

In the last decade, I have become increasingly aware of my privilege. Watching the impact of austerity on the lives of sick and disabled people, single parents, people on low incomes and those from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities constantly reminds me how lucky I am. True, it would only take an accident or losing my job for me to lose some of those privileges, but even then, I still have a lot to fall back on if the worst happens. Throughout my life I have been given a great deal.

And now we are living in a global pandemic, which is highlighting this inequality as never before. While I can work at home in safety, drive to the shops to stock up on food, enjoy my garden and exercise on my bike, others are less fortunate. Many health and social care workers risk their lives every day caring for the sick without adequate protection. While people in frontline jobs such as delivery services or takeaways are more likely to be exposed to infection, particularly if they have to travel by public transport. Sick, disabled and elderly

people most susceptible to this disease face long term lockdown, reliant on charity, the odd state food parcel and the ability to get a supermarket delivery slot, in order to be fed. Parents living in poor housing struggle with keeping children entertained with no outdoor space. As coronavirus rages through care homes, impoverished northern cities, killing people from BAME communities disproportionately, we privileged folk remain in our houses protected from the worst danger.

It is easy to feel guilty about having such privilege. But that is a pointless and somewhat indulgent response. God doesn't want our guilt. God wants us to recognise our privilege and do something with it. Particularly now. This is a time when God is rightly demanding a great deal from us and we must act accordingly. It is time stand alongside those who are most affected, amplifying their voices. This is a moment in history that demands us to be prophetic, to cry out for justice. For example, calling on the government to ensure:

Health and social care workers are provided with PPE.

Private green spaces are opened to those without gardens so they can exercise freely.

Lockdown remains until there is a proper track, trace, and isolate programme in place.

Economic security for low paid workers and those on benefits.

It is also a time to recognise that this crisis brings opportunity in its wake. For too long, we have all tolerated living in a world driven by greed and consumerism. Coronavirus is teaching us the virtues of living at a slower pace, the value of kindness and community, the importance of frontline workers, reminding us that when the traffic falls silent, we can hear the birds sing and breathe more freely. If we choose, we can emerge from this crisis with a new way of living. We can, if we want, develop fairer economic systems such as the doughnut model prescribed by Kate Raworth. We can ensure there is basic income for all citizens to provide an

adequate safety. We can invest in public services again choosing to build high quality, affordable housing, so that no-one lives in damp and squalor. We can continue providing opportunities for remote working and communication, enabling sick and disabled to participate in society on equal terms. And we can nourish the environment, living more sustainably, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and increasing wildlife havens.

When this pandemic ends, a better world is possible if we want it. It is up to us, the privileged, to make sure it happens.

*For look, I am going to create new heavens, and a new earth, the past will not be remembered and will no more come to mind.'*

Isaiah 65:17-18

[\*\(Virginia Moffatt\)\*](#)

## A video

[Click here to see a video](#) by Dan Evans & Andy Hunter, from the Presence project.

[\*\(Dan Evans / Andy Hunter\)\*](#)

Darkness enfolds us  
Pressing in and suffocating  
All hope seems lost  
And yet  
And yet...  
There is light to be seen  
Hidden sometimes  
- or perhaps we have our eyes shielded,  
Persuaded that the flicker will forever be extinguished  
And yet  
And yet...  
It stubbornly persists  
Reckless and foolhardy hope  
And shows us the way out when we are ready.

Words and image: Andy Campbell

[\*\(Andy Campbell\)\*](#)

## A download

Download this prayerful, poetic reflection on the Beatitudes, by Mark Berry.

[Click here to download.](#)

*(Mark Berry)*

## A reading

Acts 1: 1-11.

[Click here to see a version.](#)

## A poem

And then Jesus' time on earth was done.

He was born,

raised,

worked,

ministered,

taught,

healed,

suffered

died,

rose again,

fulfilled the prophecies

and then He ascended into Heaven.

Finally the disciples truly understood;  
This time the disciples celebrated.

Finally the disciples knew;  
They knew they had to tell the world  
about Jesus.

Finally the disciples knew they'd never  
be alone;  
They knew the Holy Spirit was going  
to come down to earth to be with  
them.

The disciples knew they'd never be  
alone again.

We know we are never alone.  
Do you know you never need be  
alone ever again?

This is our faith!  
This is our truth!  
We are never alone!

*([Emma Major](#))*

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This series is curated by [Andy Campbell](#) and [Simon Cross](#). This edition features contributions from:

***Mark Berry (poet, musician & pioneer), Andy Campbell (life coach & poet), Liz Chart (observer, sense-tester & way finder), Simon Cross (writer), Dan Evans (poet), Keith Hebden (author & comedian), Andy Hunter (DJ, composer & producer), Mark Kensett (photographer), Emma Major (lay pioneer minister & poet), Roger Mitchell (political theologian & activist), Virginia Moffatt (writer & activist), Billie Sylvain (artist), James Stacey (poet, & teacher), Robb & Ruth Sutherland (musicians with long hair and electric guitars), Barry Taylor (philosopher, theologian, musician & artist), Tim Watson (priest, illustrator & poet) & Ben Wildflower (artist).***