



Dear friends,

Lent will be well underway by the time you read this. I don't know about you, but I am always struck by the way in which, in our part of the world, the light becomes noticeably longer and stronger through these weeks of Spring, even as the faith stories we tell become ever more challenging as we approach the days of Holy Week. Flowers budding, the earth greening, even as we walk the wilderness path...

There is disorientation in this for me each Lent, and this year I find it amplified by the challenge of navigating this current phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. This time last March, many of us held on to the fact that the seasons still turned despite the challenges around us. We looked to the predictable transition through Spring and towards Summer to reassure us that ultimately 'all would be well', despite the turmoil of our present time.

A year later, there is much to reflect on. This has been, for most of us, a year of profound disorientation. A year where what we see around us does not match up with what our heads and hearts tell us, in so many different ways. If you, like me, experience travel sickness, you may know that one of the primary causes is the way the visual cues our brains receive do not match what our balance and movement sensors are saying. Our eyes tell us we are moving as the car speeds down the road, while our bodies are in, one sense, stationary. For some, it is an extremely unpleasant experience. Through this strangest of years, I wonder if many of us are experiencing emotional and spiritual 'travel sickness'.

Trite though it may sound, I would like to suggest that we try to ensure during this Lenten period that we pause regularly to recognise any spiritual, emotional or physical disorientation we are experiencing; to be honest about how we really are before God, and maybe also with a trusted friend. To re-orient ourselves, to see clearly where we are. As things change again in our response to Covid-19, we will have another phase of adjustment to live through. We know too that alongside the changing rules around social interaction, we must turn our full attention to things which may have been set to one side during this acute crisis, both personally, and nationally and internationally. The climate emergency, and the profound inequalities across our world have only been highlighted by Covid-19, and the call to justice, mercy and humility is as insistent as ever.

In the midst of all this, it is no surprise to hear that several leaders of retreats and quiet days are offering time with the work of Julian of Norwich, who lived in an era of plague and uncertainty. She said "all will be well, and all will be well and all manner of things will be well", and "He said not 'Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be dis-eased'; but he said, 'Thou shalt not be overcome.'" She reminds us that in all things we are held in the love of God. I was gifted this hymn new to me recently, by one whose generous grace in living was also gift to me. You might like to look at the whole, which can be found at Singing the Faith 639.

"We expect a bright tomorrow;  
All will be well;  
Faith can sing through days of sorrow,  
All, all is well.  
On our Father's love relying,  
Jesus every need supplying,  
Then in living, or in dying,  
All must be well."

May we be those who hold in tension a fierce determination to participate in God's continual recreation of a world shaped by God's love, alongside our confidence that, within the love of God, 'all will be well'. Amen.

Peace, Jo