

We are now three weeks into 'lock-down' and self-isolation. The initial novelty has worn off. For some people boredom might have set in, or resentment, or either loneliness or a sense of being crowded depending on circumstance; for others a 'new normal' where daily customs and routines have begun to form. Many parents of school-age children are ignoring the traditional Easter holidays and maintaining the rhythm of *Home Schooling*. Speaking for life in the Vicarage, that is exactly what we are doing: Breakfast with times tables; PE with Jo Wicks every weekday morning (it's pretty tough!); Spellings, writing and reading; Science with Maddie Moate (via YouTube); Playtime and lunch; Art of some description (even with glitter!!); more Maths; Playtime and gardening; Tea and TV; Bath, stories and bedtime; Gin for me and Emma! There are subtle variations but each day broadly follows this pattern. Into which Emma and I still have to find time to work, exercise, and entertain an increasingly assertive 3 year old! A 'new normal' has emerged. I suspect our new normal is not too dissimilar to many other families.

We are not the first people either to ever experience a paradigm shift in the way we operate. Many of you will remember the 'new normal' that emerged as a result of World War II and the enforced necessity to do things differently. We know we can adapt when either we are compelled to or choose to.

The same is true when we think of the streets of Jerusalem 2000 years ago. There, on the Day of Preparation for Passover (Good Friday), the man the crowd had hailed as King only days earlier as he rode into the city on a donkey was rejected by the same crowd as they shouted 'crucify'. There, Jesus – the itinerant preacher, healer, and story teller – was executed on a cross and buried in a tomb. For those first disciples of Jesus their world had changed forever. The one whom they believed was going to save and redeem Israel had been condemned as a criminal to a brutal death at the hands of the Roman authorities. Fear seized them, so they locked themselves away whilst they tried to understand what had happened, what must they now do, and who they really were. Darkness, despair, anxiety, and fear became their 'new normal'.

But this initial 'new normal' gave way to a greater 'new normal' – one filled with life, light, and love. Through the mysterious workings of God this Jesus was raised to new life and appeared to the disciples. He spoke with Mary Magdalene at the tomb – even though she didn't recognise him at first; he walked to Emmaus and opened the Scriptures to his disciples – who likewise didn't recognise him until he blessed and broke bread; he showed the marks of the nails in his hands and feet to Thomas a week later so that Thomas be might be convinced he had risen. The despair, rejection, isolation, and grief had given way to joy, inclusion, relationship, and life.

Like those first disciples, we do not know when our 'new normal' will be transformed and turned into a more glorious and greater way of being. But that day will come. The lockdown and isolation will end – when it is safe to do so. Things will never return to how they were but a new 'new normal' will emerge.

It has been wonderful to see the kindness and loving-service exercised by so many over recent weeks by so many. That kindness, I hope, will not vanish when the lock-down is lifted. Our 'phone buddies' have been in contact with so many people – possibly people they didn't even know before. Friendships are developing. Our gratitude for people who hitherto have not been recognised as 'important' in society but now regarded and valued as 'key' is heart-warming and reminds me of words from the Magnificat: *He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek.*

Change, 'new normals', paradigm shifts are often things we try to avoid. And yet, through them comes life – life in all its fullness (John 10: 10). We don't like change when we feel it has a negative impact on our lives but we learn to live with it when we can see the positives. Sometimes the change is simply a matter of perspective, other times it is more radical and all encompassing. Jesus said, as he was preparing his disciples for his impending death, *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it can yield no fruit...* The transformation here is complete, whole-hearted, all encompassing. Besides that changes that have been hoisted upon us by this pandemic, I wonder what changes do we each as individuals need to make so that our lives may yield fruit, abandon fruit? What whole-hearted transformation would enable us to be better disciples of Jesus? What new customs would enable us to *go deeper into God*, transforming our prayer lives and our witness to the risen Lord?

In the joy of the risen Christ, and confident in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection for all people, let us wait with eager longer for the 'new normal' yet to be revealed. Let us hold fast to the promise that life will come out of death, joy out of grief, light out of darkness. And let our cry always be...

**Alleluia! Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

I wish you all a very happy and blessed Easter and all joy and peace in believing.

Fr Michael Macey