

Devotional Blog – Sunday 18th April 2021

This past week has seen another major step towards our society re-opening again. Shops, hairdressers, and gyms were all allowed to open their doors, for the first time, since England was forced into lockdown on 4th January.

Although many areas, including London were under serve restrictions before Christmas.

Pubs, cafes, and restaurants can now offer their services, but only in the outdoors. Given the weather this week I think there was a need to wrap up and eat up as meals would have cooled down rather quickly.

We have all had to hibernate during the dark winter months that accompanied lockdown and like many animals we have emerged in the springtime. The world of high street shopping, like many things will not be the same. Many stores will not re-open due to the financial cost of the pandemic. Our towns will be littered with empty shop units, with little likely hood of them being occupied anytime soon.

Folks are craving for life to return to “normal”, to go back to how things were over twelve months ago, but it is very unlikely that life will ever be the same as it once was before Covid-19 hit our shores. None of us can turn the clock back and each one of us has celebrated at least one birthday, so we are all a bit older.

Sports venues, theatres and other places of entertainment are still waiting to welcome back the paying public, but again, the experience will be quite different. Social distancing and the wearing of masks are likely to be with us for some time yet, so we will have to wait to see how it effects such activities.

As a society, we need to ask ourselves if we really want to go back to the “good old days”, or do we want to press forward with the greater sense of community and less air pollution we have experienced over the last year or so. I know for many lives have been really tough, living in isolation with the extra anxiety that has caused, so for those any lifting in restrictions must come as a great relief.

The church has also had to learn to adapt to a new and different way of life and many of the practices that have been introduced might be here to stay. There is a sense that church as well as the community as a whole has to rebuild itself as we all emerge from hibernation, into a new environment.

Following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, at the hands of the Babylonians, the Jewish people were tasked with its rebuilding after they could return to the city. It was a daunting task. They started well and got as far as

completing the foundations. Work was then halted for 16 years. God spoke to the people through the prophet Haggai.

“Be strong all you people of the land, declares the Lord, and work. For I am with you.” (Haggai 2:4) Work went on a pace after that, but it was not a small or a quick job, in fact it took a further 5 years to complete. When finished, it was not the same as the original, in fact it was better.

Haggai 2:9 **“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty”.**

I believe that this is an encouraging word for us and the church in general as we seek to “rebuild” our community. Let us not fall into the trap of trying to recreate things as they were but build something greater.

As the prophet Isaiah exalts – **Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!** (Isaiah43:18-19a)

This is no small job or quick fix. We need to be in this for the long haul!

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