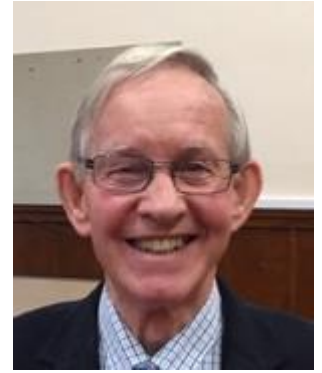


THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Wednesday 13th May 2020

by Bob Bradnock



ON CHRISTIAN HOPE IN A TIME OF PLAGUE

At the start of our encounter with Coronavirus the Baptist theologian Keith Clements circulated friends with the following quotation from the Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote to a friend on how he will behave as a pastor during a time of plague:

I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me, and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbour needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.

Centuries later, T.S. Eliot wrote:

What life have you if not life together?
There is no life not lived in community,
And no community not lived in the presence of GOD,
Even the anchorite who meditates alone,
For whom the days and nights repeat the praise of God,
Prays for the church, the body of Christ incarnate,

Choruses from the Rock 1934

Today we celebrate the revival of 'community spirit', and are grateful for those friends and neighbours who do care. Yet we all know that

despite the wonders of zoom and what's app, and the many new ways we are finding of doing things, we all need genuine human contact, and that not all about our communities is good.

Billy Connolly, (much loved in the Glasgow where I now live) has spoken repeatedly of the disastrous re-development in 1960s Glasgow, with the replacement of tenement blocks with soulless, characterless places such as the settlement to which he and his family felt they had been 'banished', Drumchapel. I now live on the edge of Drumchapel and it is very much part of my local community.

Today Drumchapel shows plenty of evidence of the spirit of community. But as we look forward to the ultimate end of lockdown, however far ahead that may have to be to protect the health of all, we are faced with the renewed question: what kind of community do we want to build? And how in the church in particular do we see it and create it?

One of the many ways in which we are so blessed is in having a rich history of creative thinkers and writers who have posed the question and pointed the way. For us, Easter, so recently celebrated in such an unusual way, still holds the key. George Herbert's wonderful poem Easter came to mind as last week I walked down from Cochno Hill, with its majestic 50 mile views across Loch Lomond to the still snow-marked Trossachs to the north east and Goat Fell in Arran, to the West: what is the meaning of this beauty, and to what purpose? And in its midst, what is the meaning of pain and suffering?

I got me flowers to straw thy way;
I got me boughs off many a tree:
But thou wast up by break of day,
And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

The Sunne arising in the East,
Though he give light, & th' East perfume;
If they should offer to contest
With thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,
Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?
We count three hundred, but we misse:
There is but one, and that one ever.

It is the day of resurrection, open to us not through proof but through faith alone, and our real source of hope, the means of building trust and love and fully engaged sharing, through families, friends and our local neighbourhoods, and out to embrace the world. What hope there is in this vision of truth and grace!

Bob Bradnock