

Dear Friend

How are you feeling at this moment on this sunny - as I write this anyway! - Monday? I'm a little late with this message as a shopping trip this morning was essential - not least to post some applications for marriage licences, which, as one of the Bishop's Surrogates, I have been doing a great deal of since church weddings were allowed once again to take place, and there has been no time for banns to be called.

Returning home after an hour or so - followed by another half hour or so washing or otherwise cleaning every item - I realised how tired I felt. Just being aware that the person you are doing your best to avoid by at least two metres could be an asymptomatic carrier of Covid-19, introduces a whole new level of stress to human interaction. The simplest of tasks which you would do without giving a second thought, have taken on a weight and significance. Even though the numbers are going in the right direction, it seems that many in the medical and scientific community are bracing themselves, and warning the government, that the country could well suffer a second wave of cases.

All this is not meant to disturb or alarm you, but I am concerned that as restrictions are eased that people will lose the sense of alertness and become complacent. So, to return to my original question - how are you feeling at this moment? One of the wonderful aspects of our faith in a God of love, is that God knows everything about everything - nothing is hidden from his sight. Whatever is going on in your life at this moment, the Lord is totally and completely aware of it, and - even more wonderfully - is totally and completely interested in you and your life. His concern and love for you outweighs all the love you have ever experienced from your parents, family and friends. Of course it is so much harder to experience the love of God, who is unseen, as it is to know the love of family and friends. In these days when human contact might well be totally absent, how much more important is it that we experience some touch from our loving heavenly Father.

Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians writes these amazing words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

*2 Corinthians 1.3-5*

All of us need to be consoled at some point in our lives, and perhaps never more so than at this time. We are the objects of God's love, and in just the same way as a good parent wants to offer comfort and consolation to their children when they are afflicted in some way, so our God longs to comfort and console us. How do we experience this consolation? As with so many aspects of our Christian lives, we need to approach God with nothing in our hands and hearts but faith and trust, and simply tell him exactly how we are feeling - yes, I know he already knows! This is not to

impart information but to place ourselves as seekers willing to ask for help. That help is always at hand, so by expressing our thoughts and feelings to him, we are allowing the Lord to come close to us; we need to consciously give God access to those hurting places, those fearful places, those anxious places in our lives, and just leave the rest to his Spirit and his grace.

Whether you are able to rejoice in the Lord with a song in your heart, or whether that song is a lament filled with sorrow, may our gracious and loving God draw near to you at this moment, so you may experience the consolation that no-one else but the Lord can bring to your heart and mind.

So may the experience of the Psalmist be yours today:

10 Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!

O LORD, be my helper!

11 You have turned my mourning into dancing;

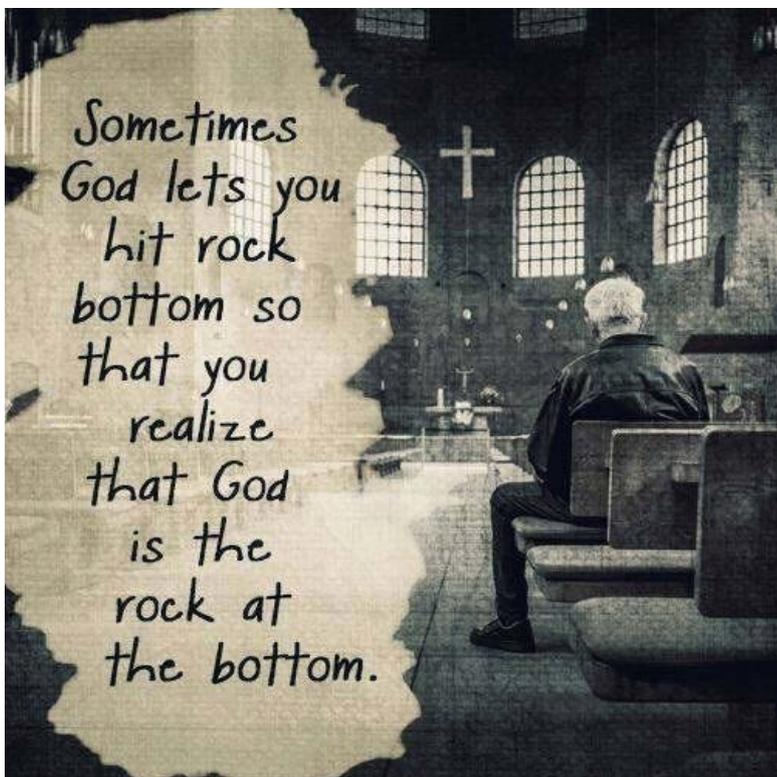
you have taken off my sackcloth

and clothed me with joy,

12 so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.

O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you for ever.

*Psalm 30.10-12*



With love and prayers

Simon