

Dear Friend

Steve Tucker sent the following thought from J. John, who is a well-known Anglican minister and evangelist, with a great sense of humour! I hope you will find his thought both challenging and amusing!

This is not an April fool! But I did find an amusing prank from the 17th century on the Edinburgh News website:

### **The Washing of the Lions**

One of the first known April Fools' Day pranks in the UK occurred on 1 April 1698, when several people went to the Tower of London to see the 'washing of the lions', in the moat.



This joke continued to be known for many years after, and in the mid-19th century a group of pranksters printed up official-looking tickets which promised admittance to the annual, yet non-existent, lion-washing ceremony, and distributed them around London on April 1.

With much love and prayers

Simon



---

## Lightening the Load on Lockdown

Unless you are working on the frontline in the present crisis – and in which case may you be both blessed and protected – you are probably in isolation or quarantine. Given that, I thought I would offer you some reflections.

I'm not convinced that the sudden emergence of what we can call 'isolation experts' helps us. At this time of enormous economic problems I suppose we should be grateful for any growth industry but we are now hearing from an ever-larger number of individuals whose credentials for teaching us about isolation are that they have been astronauts, served in submarines or were once trapped in a lift.

One special group of experts who particularly trouble me are those who, with bubbling enthusiasm, suggest that this is a time for doing those things you always wanted to do but couldn't. They point out that it was while they were in quarantine that Shakespeare wrote *King*

*Lear* and Newton came up with calculus. Some of these experts suggest that we set ourselves extreme goals: to learn a new language, to read all of Dickens or repaint every room of our house. Others suggest we set similarly extreme goals for our body, building up those flabby muscles. There are Christian versions of these demanding goals: to learn biblical Hebrew or Greek or to read all of C.S. Lewis or R.T. Kendall or N.T. Wright.

Now I respect this setting of extreme goals and, when this is over, I look forward to applauding those who have achieved them. But I want to express caution. It's an almost universal human trait that when we come across someone struggling with a burden, we offer well-intentioned words of sympathy and encouragement which actually make matters worse. (You know the thing: that wonderfully helpful advice to depressed people that they should 'just cheer up!' – why do you think they are depressed?). It's an age-old problem: one fault that Jesus found with the Pharisees was that they burdened people with an impossible number of rules and regulations. Unfortunately, the situation we are now in seems to be a fertile time for those people who have an ability to add a little bit more to the weight that many are feeling crushed under. They specialise in carrying straws to put on the backs of struggling camels. There are problems with setting unattainable and unrealistic goals because the fact is that most of us will not attain them. Life's tough enough right now without the word *failure* hanging around our neck, and the last thing any of us want poured over our isolation diet of beans or pizza is the sauce of guilt.

So here let me offer some more modest ambitions. Let me suggest that we should hope that, at the end of it all, we will be able to say things like:

- I did not use duct tape on the children.
- I did not have more than six meals a day.
- I didn't lie awake every night worrying that I wasn't worrying enough.
- I did not set fire to the house.
- I didn't watch too much rubbish on tv.
- I did not run out of toilet paper.
- I stayed sane (more or less).

- I did not wear my pyjamas for more than 5 days running.
- I didn't scream.
- I cut my own hair.
- Those who were isolated with me still love me.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you may also look forward to being able to say, at the very least, 'Thank you, Lord, that I never let go of you, because I knew you'd never let go of me.'

In other words: decide what you have to do and seek to do it. If you can do more, then all well and good (I especially recommend 'pray more' and 'read Bible' as goals). But it's better to succeed at what you need to do than fail at what you don't. Sometimes, all that is asked of us is to survive and stay sane. The Gospels tell us that ordinary people found Jesus much more appealing than their own religious leaders and one reason for this was that he did not impose unrealistic expectations on them. We read that he said, 'For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light' (Matthew 11:30 NLT). Thank heaven for that!

[J.John](#)

Reverend Canon