

Living in strange times

As I write this we are just entering a period of social distancing or self-isolation. As part of the measures for containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, we have been instructed to suspend all public worship. This is unprecedented and I'm sure I'm not the only one who finds it quite distressing, particularly as we're heading towards the most important festival of the Christian year. It seems that we won't be allowed to gather for worship on Easter Sunday. It may well be several months before we next come together to celebrate the resurrection. These are strange times.

The disciples must have thought they were living through strange times too. The man they thought of as their leader had been crucified but on that first Easter morning they received the news that he had risen from the dead. Despite knowing that Jesus was alive they continued to hide away. We're told that they gathered together in a locked house as they were afraid of persecution (John 20).

But then things changed for them. They were visited by the risen Jesus who gave them the gift of his Holy Spirit. In the power of the Spirit they were able to spread the good news of the resurrected Christ to the world. Experiencing the presence of Jesus despite their isolation in a locked room began the process which led to our celebration of Easter.

Dame Julian of Norwich was another who lived in strange times. When she was a child the Black Death swept Norwich bringing the city to a halt. When she herself later succumbed to illness she received visions in which she saw Christ. When she recovered she withdrew into isolation to bring herself closer to Jesus in prayer and contemplation. She wrote of her experience of the presence of Jesus and one of her most well-known sayings, from the depth of her faith, is "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

We too can hold to that same faith as we find ourselves in isolation from our regular church congregation. We can remember that we are always in the presence of Jesus. That is what we celebrate at Easter. Our connection with God is not broken because we can no longer gather together for worship. It may even be a time when we can become more aware of the power of God's Spirit in our lives. So while this Easter Day will seem very strange we can continue to rejoice and give thanks that 'He is risen, he is risen indeed.'