

Resources for Churches...

Responding to the Coronavirus

Learning from Lockdown

I wonder whether you ever played 'Hide and Seek' as a child - the game where in the time it took to count up to 20 you had to secrete yourself in the most unfindable place in the house so you were the last to be found when the seeker came looking. Maybe you found yourself in the under-the-stairs cupboard or the back of the wardrobe or under a bed. Wherever it was, it was usually dark. You squeezed yourself in as far as you could get and waited. The best hiding places were the darkest; where everything was completely black and you could see nothing at all. But then you discovered, as you waited and waited, that your eyes gradually adjusted to the darkness and you started to notice the shapes of what was around you, and began to make sense of where you were and see things from a new perspective.



One of the common words we have used to describe this period of lockdown has been darkness - it has felt a bit like a black hole where suddenly everything is unknown and unseeable. We might have felt paralysed with fear - that sense of being in a confined space and not daring to move in case we banged into something and hurt ourselves or knocked something over and created a huge disturbance. But there are also things we have felt which have differed from 'Hide and Seek', because we didn't just happily skip off into our dark places. It hasn't felt like a game that we had a choice in whether we joined in or not and that, in it all, we knew we were happy and safe. Maybe it has felt more like when an irate parent ordered us into our bedroom and told us not to come out again until they gave their permission. We have felt confined and not in control.

The dark place of lockdown has felt bewildering, confusing, disorienting and lonely. The longer it has been, the more we have struggled with the waiting and not knowing how long it would go on for. We have missed our loved ones, hugs and kisses, the freedom of doing what we liked when we like, and the joy of meeting together. We have had our times of frustration, anger and panic. We have even felt our very lives have been under threat and have found ourselves anxious for our families and fearful for our lives. We have felt unsafe, insecure, uncertain.

And yet through it all we have known we are not alone; that we have a God who has promised to be with us; that in Christ we have a light that shines in the darkness, a light which the darkness cannot overcome; and that our God is a Creator who brings order out of chaos and from darkness and formlessness creates a world that is good and beautiful. In his book 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', C.S. Lewis tells a story based on the concept that when you enter into a dark, wooden space where you expect to find nothing but a load of old fur coats, you discover by accident a whole new world opening up for you to step into and explore. It invites us to consider the possibility that our own places of darkness can be places of opening our minds and hearts to new things, where we can be changed on the inside, where we can let go of some of the former things we had held onto too dearly and so release ourselves into discovering the good and beautiful things God wants us to find. This picture can help us to realise that our time of lockdown presents us with a place where, for us too, growing accustomed to the darkness can help us see things from a whole new perspective, but that this is only the beginning. It gives us a new realm of existence to explore, a place where we can discover things about ourselves we did not know, a place where we can find God showing us things, teaching us things and reshaping and transforming us, and a place where there is spring time - new growth, fresh shoots, new life being born and new fruit being formed.

Resources for Churches...

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For us as a church, lockdown has meant we have had to do things differently. We have had to adopt new routines to structure our week and have been exploring new patterns of prayer and ways of praying - breathing prayers, circling prayers, embracing stillness and silence and finding God in the present moment. We have looked at various Bible passages and asked ourselves probing questions to open our minds to what God is wanting to say to us, create within us and change us in the here and now. And we have been encouraged to each discover how God is seeking to draw us deeper into him and to show us the purpose he has for our lives.

As this period of lockdown begins to evolve and the ways of how best to move on are being pondered, this is a time for us too to take stock and review where we are at. None of us will emerge from the wardrobe and go back to life just as it was before. So we need to have noticed what God has been showing us, what are the things he wants us to leave behind and not pick back up, what are the things that have been created in us which are to nourish, inform and equip us as we go forward. How have we been changed and transformed through this? How, as a result, will we better build up one another and convey God's love and hope to our hurting community? How will our new life look different from our old one?

Note down here what jumps out at you in this.

What fresh insights have you gained?

What scripture passages resonate with these?

Spend time talking to God about what he is saying to you through these.

Write down how you will take these thoughts forward with you. Do they prompt you to take any specific action in response

My Lord and God,
create in me a new heart and mind.
May my thoughts be your thoughts,
my ways be your ways,
my love for others be as your love for me.
May I know your good, pleasing and perfect will
and your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Amen.