

Thought for Good Friday

'By his wounds we are healed.' (Isaiah 53.5)

Thank God for Good Friday, which helps us to get things in perspective. It may seem strange not to be able to meet together this year to focus on the cross of Jesus. But perhaps there is a way in which we can identify even more closely with Jesus in these unexpected conditions.

In the past few weeks everyone has become familiar with the term 'self-isolation'. At first only the elderly and the vulnerable were required to take special precautions, but then, as the virus COVID-19 spread, everyone was told to 'stay home and stay safe', only getting into contact with other people for a very limited number of reasons. This is at odds with our nature as social animals, and has become quite uncomfortable as time has gone on. How it can affect our condition is evident from the fact that in prison solitary confinement is the most feared punishment.

Perhaps the saddest moment in the account of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus is when we read that *all the disciples deserted him and fled* (Matthew 26.56 and Mark 14.50). Jesus was left alone. No-one stood by him. This was not self-isolation; it was the isolation of betrayal, denial and rejection. As the prophet Isaiah had foretold, *he was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering* (Isaiah 53.3). At the critical moment Jesus was deprived of the solace of human companionship.

Isaiah writes movingly of the sorrows of the Redeemer and with great insight sees that it was more than a case of a rejected servant of God. He realises that his suffering is greater because *he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, ... he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and by his wounds we are healed*. What Jesus did alone on the cross he did for all humanity. It was God's plan and purpose that he should by his suffering carry the weight of all the world's woes, its sin, oppression and injustice.

Compared to that, what is our deprivation? As we self-isolate we aren't rejected, but are remembered by loving friends and neighbours who make sure we are all right. We have the various forms of modern media for keeping in touch with our families. But, during the hours of his agony, Jesus also had the consolation of knowing the outcome of his lonely vigil: the salvation of all those who put their faith in him. Isaiah ends his prophecy with a note of triumph: *He will see the result of the suffering of his soul and be satisfied*.

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