

Good morning everyone, and can I just say that it is so exciting and wonderful for me to be worshipping with you all again, even if it is remotely.

My talk today is based loosely on a talk I was working on to deliver to the students at my school in England, to address how faith is important in these difficult times. I know that a lot of people have spoken about hope, peace and love as messages to get us through and I appreciate that they are all important messages to live by. I however, have come to appreciate more the time that I have been given that would not have existed before the lockdown. I acknowledge that there are some of us who have been hit very hard by this crisis and do not want to take away from that sadness at all. However, I feel blessed to be able to say that I have been given time to spend with family and friends with few outside pressures, that I have been able to refocus my love and energy on those I care for and that I have had time to reflect on my path in life and my relationship with Christ. The passages I chose for today all come back to this central message that life is planned for us and whilst things may seem hard or difficult or annoying that there is a reason and a purpose. Throughout this talk I will reflect on each passage that I have chosen and how it can resonate with us at this moment.

The Ecclesiastes passage reminds us that in life there will be a time for all that we need to do. That right now may be a time to weep, mourn and refrain from embracing but that it will soon be a time to laugh, build, dance and embrace. Throughout all this uncertainty we need to cherish the time that we have been given to be closer to those we love and celebrate the smaller things in life. There will be some adjustments when we return to normality, when children miss having their parents at home, where families miss exercising, baking or doing other tasks together and where home cooked meals get replaced by quick alternatives as our lives get busier and

busier. We need to hold dear this time we have been given, not only to be with our families but also to reflect on our relationship with God. When the busyness of life takes over, we cannot let ourselves lose that time for spiritual contemplation. One of the things I did over Lent, which I am hoping to continue was to spend 5 to 10 minutes in quiet reflection at the end of the day, which would help me refocus and bring all that I did into the hands of God.

In the psalm we are reminded that the Lord is our rock and fortress, our strength when we are weak. These are especially important things to hold onto when the world seems to be against us. I know that there are all moments when faith is hard to hold onto but knowing that there is someone out there, watching us and ready to rescue us from the evil that surrounds us, brings comfort. Speaking personally, there have been times when I have questioned what has happened in my life, but in everything I am brought back to the knowledge that God has always and will always be with me. I am also pleased that where I am in my life at the moment, I am able to question as well as provide answers for the inquisitive students around me who want to learn why I do and how they can bring Christ into their lives. Whilst I can't currently take this time to proclaim his wonder, I know that when we return I can continue those conversations and be there for students as they explore their relationship with God and proclaim his wonderful works.

The letter from Peter, calls us to reflect on what we have been given by God and how we can give back for all that we have been given. We are called to live a life that is full of faithfulness, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection and love. These qualities are even more important to possess now, as they will help us focus on what is important and allow us to steer clear from any sin or

transgressions that surround us. Being able to continue on this path will bring us closer to God and to each other. In times of hardship, it is very easy to become self-centred or self-focused, however this crisis has reminded us that community is what is most important and although we need to be socially distant, we don't have to be socially isolated.

In times of hardship, it can also be difficult to remember the wonder that we receive from being in a relationship with Christ. But Christ himself, called us to him when we are weary and burdened, when we are struggling, so that he can make our burdens light. This message is repeated throughout the gospels and the messages that continued to be shared by his disciples. Christ has called us to him as little children, and although we can lose our way and get distracted by life, he will be there for us when we return.

And so, in this time of upheaval, it is important to remember that all things have been decided by God, who ensures that in everything we have the time for the important things. That through our faithfulness and the love of his son we are able to come to him. That despite all that seems to be wrong or happening at a bad time, it is there to test our faith and allow us to see Christ more fully when we open our hearts to his wonder. This is particularly true this morning, on Pentecost Sunday, when we remember the moment when the Holy Spirit descended upon the earth and spoke through the disciples. Whilst it was a moment of wonderment for all, the Holy Spirit still lives and dwells among us. In these times of difficulty, we need to hold dear to these three things. That God the father, watches over us and has plans for our lives. That God the Son suffered for us and shows us the way to God. That God the Holy Spirit is constantly with us and is alive within us.