

# ✠ Iona Prayer Circle

April 2020

Dear Friends,

This is a very different letter from the one I had ready to send. The corona virus situation has moved so fast it seemed wrong to leave it to a single sentence. You may have heard by now that the grand Abbey opening has been delayed and that all Historic Scotland sites are closed now. You will certainly have experienced the panic buying that has emptied supermarket shelves, and here in the UK, had supermarkets restricting the amounts that people can buy. We are all meant to be distancing ourselves from each other at the least, and others are in deliberate isolation. There is a lot of fear and denial about.

I read an interesting internet letter from a doctor in Canada who is a specialist in infectious diseases. Whilst he is concerned for the welfare of those vulnerable to the virus, he is not scared of it. He is more fearful of the loss of reason and fear that means ordinarily sensible people are stockpiling unreasonable quantities of goods, stealing gel and masks from hospitals that are needed for healthcare providers and the general massive change to the way we live.

Fear has its place in our lives, it keeps us safe when we cross the road and alerts us to different needs according to the situation. However, it is a bad guide as a way to live, and particularly so when it makes us home in on ourselves and forget the needs of those around us. The plea of an exhausted care worker who could not buy the food she needed after a long shift, was unforgettable. Perfect love casts out all fear 1John 4v18. I think I'm going to find that a tough bit of spiritual work, but I am seeing places where love is at work and that's a help. From the schemes neighbours are setting up to help each other, to the kindness in an assistant's eyes and supermarkets making special times for the elderly and NHS workers. The responses locally when a new mum needed loo roll was impressive. There is plenty to show that we are capable of love and care even under threat.

I have heard that people in Wuhan have noticed environmental changes with the general absence of human activity. The birds are singing again, and the skies are clear of pollution. So significantly, that one report by Professor Marshall Burke said that 4000 under 5 and 73000 over 70 in Wuhan would have died of the air pollution. This is four times as many as died from the coronavirus. It does not in any way say that perhaps the virus is a blessing, it is certainly not, but it does show the quiet deaths going on under the headlines that are a consequence of our communal way of life, and a different perspective. Perhaps this is a timely reminder that we are part of creation, not lords of it, that we are asked to care for creation, as Desmond Tutu has said, 'to keep it, not to abuse it'. I am finding the beauty of creation a real blessing and help just now, there is plenty of gardening to keep me busy and I will be walking in the countryside round me when possible.

So this will be a very different Holy week and Easter, which was what I originally wrote about. No public worship, no Palm Sunday processions, no following the cross round the market place, no flower groups decorating the church, no joyous Easter services. But God will still be with us, and some creative ways of worshipping online have already sprung into action. The church I attend put a sermon and blessing on the church web-site, filmed in church by the vicar on his own. On Sunday he and his wife went to church at the usual time and celebrated the Eucharist, we prayed at home at the same time. I have 'attended' a service that was live on face-book, and heard of Zoom conferencing, a web site, where others have had a service together. For those who have avoided the innovation of the internet this might be a time to try. The residents for the Iona Community still on Iona, five of them, will meet at 9 each morning, sitting at the proscribed distance in the choir stalls, and pray the office together. We can pray at the same time, they will also keep the healing service prayers in the Abbey on Tuesday evening. I have added a copy of the St. John's cross and a candle to our prayer space. You

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will have your own ideas I'm sure. The best antidote to fear is the great love of God. This joins the spaces between us, just as a smile crosses 2 metres, and both will love and strengthen us through this journey.

God bless you this Easter  
And thankyou for praying

Chris Polhill

Ever present God,  
bless those suffering from coronavirus  
and those who care for them;  
may they know your healing;  
may the dying know your welcome.

Bless the scientists searching for solutions,  
bless the supermarkets seeking to serve us,  
Bless governments steering a new course  
may they know your wisdom.

Bless these new times we now live in;  
hold the grief for what is past  
hold the fear of present and future  
that within your love,  
we may grow in trust and peace.

Chris Polhill