



Churches Together in Alresford March Newsletter A Reflection

'I tell you nought for your comfort
Yea, nought for your desire
Except that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.' (Bishop Trevor Huddleston)



What a challenging year this has been! Early in March a merry band of us set forth to a hotel in Bournemouth for the annual Churches Together weekend. Prophetically, the theme for our discussions and prayer sessions, when we were not enjoying the sea front and convivial meals, was the Storm on the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps we already had a sense that we would not just be meditating on a familiar passage from the Gospels, but facing an indication of trouble ahead. How right we were. We returned to our homes on the Sunday afternoon with plans to meet up the following week but that was not to be. From the Monday evening every coming event in our new diaries was cancelled and Lockdown descended like an all-enveloping shroud. We became like the disciples, clinging on for dear life to their precarious boat adrift in the turbulent seas. Never has there been so much need for the calming hand of Jesus.

Our churches have responded to the ongoing crisis as well as they could and we have all received helping support from the various clergy, who have faced the unenviable task of obeying the newly imposed laws, while trying to fulfil the needs of their parishioners. Some have opened their church doors for private prayer at regular times and recently St. Gregory's has held weekday Masses in addition to their Sunday service. Parishioners within CTIA, have responded in their own ways, becoming less dependent on the clergy, who with the departure of Julia and no permanent representative of the Methodist church in Alresford, are seriously overworked. We no longer feel the absolute need for regular Sunday attendance and have made our own choices, hearing services online, listening to them on the radio, coming out of our own comfort zone and going to other churches. I have done some picking and choosing myself, attending several Sunday Eucharists in Anglican churches, including the lovely Parish church in Owslebury, and spending time of quiet meditation in St. Andrews at Tichborne which opens for private prayer on Sunday mornings.

When I was a teenager, I often attended Evensong in Tichborne, though this was against the rules of those times, when the word 'ecumenism' was rarely understood and never used. The Rev. Bryce Fletcher, who used to serve on the CTIA committee, told me that his grandmother referred to Catholics as 'those wretched Romans, who if you see them coming towards you, cross over to the other side of the road, for they are the very devil', to which Bryce now replies: 'Rosemary, who would imagine that now we can be friends!' The friendliness of all of us not just in CTIA, but through the streets and countryside around Alresford is I think one of the most positive results of the present situation when people meet and greet as they take their daily walks. Only the other day I bumped into a friend who

happened to mention that she is a practising Quaker. I made a mental note to invite her to one of our meetings. CTIA is a constant reminder of how we have all moved on.

In some of our churches the Christmas crib is still up, following the old tradition of decorations remaining up till February 2nd, the Feast of Candlemas. This helps us remember that Christmas is a beginning and not an end. To quote the Bard: 'If music be the food of love, play on', so perhaps Shakespeare had this in mind when he called the play 'Twelfth Night'. As I write this, it is nearing the end of January when we normally celebrate Church Unity week. CTIA would be meeting for shared worship and a meal. This will not be happening, so perhaps it is pertinent to quote some words from our revised Covenant: 'We declare our common belief in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit ... and we will share together our service in the community.' In these challenging and uncertain times let us take these words from the old Latin missal as our mantra: 'Sursum Corda', 'Lift up our hearts'; and to return to the theme at the beginning of this series of reflections: 'If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me and hold me fast' (Psalm 139).
God bless us all. Rosemary Chambers.