

## **The good, the bad and the hope that springs eternal**

*As lockdown restrictions ease, Bishop Joanna brings our series of weekly reflections to a close by considering the dark days of the Covid-19 pandemic and looks forward to a brighter future*

Immediately before writing this, I licensed the Revd Jim Flanagan, to his new post in Bro Lliedi: on Zoom. To think, before lockdown, I had never heard of Zoom! Now it's second nature: meetings on Zoom, services on Zoom, prayer meetings on Zoom. Coronavirus has changed all our lives, even for those of us who have not caught it nor lost a loved one to it. Some people can easily say what they think and feel but I take time to understand how I feel. I won't be able to say how this has changed me for quite some time. So, I am simply going to share with you, things that seem significant and words that help me begin to take stock of what this coronavirus journey has been like.

If anyone had asked me before, I would have said that I was one of those who just plodded on through, one day at a time, one foot in front of another, come what may. I was taken aback about how frightened I was about catching the virus. The first thing we heard about it was that it attacked the lungs. I am an asthmatic and I am old enough to remember there being no effective medicines for asthma and spending days without enough breath to speak, just struggling to breathe. My heart has gone out to those who have suffered, lost their lives, lost loved ones to this terrible disease; a virus, terrible for some but symptomless for others. My first words are fear, grief, confusion and lament.

I was fearful but so full of admiration for the care workers, the NHS staff, cleaners, doctors, nurses, admin staff, the emergency services, school staff at hubs, shop workers, delivery drivers, funeral directors and clergy taking the strangest of funerals, the list goes on, those who haven't had the safety I've had working from home but without whom our lives would have been impossible. My second words are gratitude and respect.

Yet in the midst of life being turned upside down, I have learnt new skills and had new, enriching experiences. The first two weeks of Zoom meetings were exhausting but gradually I began to appreciate the connection it gave amidst our restriction. On the Tuesday of Holy Week in my back garden, when I lit the Easter Candle on entirely the wrong day, I discovered afresh the reality of the presence of the Risen Christ as I proclaimed, "Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia." I have truly met Jesus in the presence of his disciples, in Zoom services I have been invited to, in the daily prayer events of *Thy Kingdom Come*. I've had fellowship in Zoom afternoon teas and Christian Aid Coffee mornings. I'm encouraged by the way the clergy, lay ministers and the Communications Team of this diocese have kept worship and ministry going in all sorts of ways and, in the midst of this darkness, shown us ways to connect and share the love of Jesus beyond our church buildings. I am proud that people have taken the plunge into new technology. We have all made connections that will continue long after we return to normal. My third words are carrying on.

So many things I can't do in lockdown. I miss seeing my family and friends. But it has given me time. I have taken up a new hobby: who knew I would become interested in lichen? (yes, really!!) Llys Esgob garden and the lanes around Abergwili are alive with lichen and I am enjoying learning to appreciate them. I have missed meeting people across the diocese and

driving along its beautiful roads, but being office based has given me more control of my time. I have scaffolded my life with prayer. "Seven times a day do I praise you" said the Psalmist. Being alone in my study, I can "dwell in the shelter of the Most High." I cannot go about the diocese, but I can pray, for its LMAs, its clergy, its people, for Plant Dewi, Tir Dewi, our schools, our committees, our office and so on. Our prayers are conduits of God's grace. "The Light shines in the darkness," I will proclaim at Christmas. But I don't want it to be dark, God. I don't want the light just to shine, I want the dark gone, the fear gone. God listens, patiently, silently, implacably. "The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." My last word is hope.