

**Thought for the Day (Mon 27 April – Sun 3 May)**  
**by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship at St Andrew's**

**Monday 27 April - Words in adversity**

Have you heard of Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582)?

Known as one of the great mystics of the Roman Catholic Church, she restored the austerity and contemplative character of the Carmelite religious order in Spain and wrote several spiritual classics about prayer that survive to this day.

Unfortunately, despite her great achievements, life for Saint Teresa was never easy. Her mother died when she was young and Teresa's health collapsed. She became an invalid and was barely able to leave her bed for three years. For the rest of her life, she suffered ill health, with not a day passing when she didn't feel in pain.

Despite her frailty and frequent confinement, however, she was able to administer outstanding leadership and encouragement by talking and writing to her friends and supporters.

Sound familiar? The novelty of Lockdown is fading a little, but it's great that the strengthening messages of encouragement that emerged a month ago remain in circulation. We are coming to understand that community means communication. Saint Teresa of Ávila proved that to be true. Check her out.

Loving God,  
May every encouraging word,  
Every gift of love,  
Bring hope into lonely lives  
And a blessing to the giver.



## Tuesday 28 April - Beauty in the peace

Sometimes I wake up early and lie listening to the silence.

We've been in Lockdown for over five weeks now, and one of the things that people often talk about is the peace and tranquillity that the rules of the pandemic create.

The quietness may mask what is going on behind some closed doors, where people may be coping with sickness, loneliness or fear. And it will be different in an inner city block of flats or a busy hospital. But, here in Hertford and the surrounding countryside, where the busyness of life has slowed down, there is splendour in the peace.

Taking advantage of the empty roads, my wife Jenny and I cycled over to the River Ash for walk. We stopped to watch a Red Kite, as it hung in the air and swooped down in silence. It had to get on with life but seemed to recognise the stillness of the day and didn't really want to disturb it.

Who is there like you,  
God of mercy and peace?  
Help us to hear your glorious whisper  
Breaking through the new silence  
Of the changing world in which we move.



## Wednesday 29 April - Progress in renewal

Our front garden is shaded by a silver birch.

When we moved into the house four years ago, the tree was already too large for the garden. It was rangy, thin and weak. But we let it grow, wondering (hoping?) if we did, a gale would blow it down.

Nature did not take its course and, eventually, we had to apply arboricultural healthcare in the form of a chainsaw. We had it reduced by 40%. Now it is strong, healthy and a feature of joy in our garden.

There's a lot of talk these days about how the world will look after Coronavirus has receded and Lockdown is ended. Will the way healthcare, education, employment and, yes, faith change for ever?

Before this crisis occurred, Western economies were content to create false gods. We were bowing down to the totem poles of growth. Bigger is Better. Do we now have a chance to reconsider those values?

I hope and pray that, when all this is over, we can establish national values that replace Bigger with Better; that the mantra becomes excellence, not growth for the sake of it.

Our silver birch is smaller, compact and thriving. We're happy with it.



Lord, we are beginning to learn  
That this is a fragile world that  
You have placed in our care.  
Help us to take advantage  
Of the opportunity to make it better.

## Thursday 30 April - Humour in a crisis

I haven't been able to see my ageing parents in Nottingham since February. Perhaps many people are in this predicament with members of their own families.

My mum and dad are in their 90s, but they are lucky to be living independently in their own home. Their physical strength has waned in recent years but they are mentally agile and are coping stoically with this thing called Coronavirus.

They have developed online shopping skills; have replaced their weekly trip to the library with audio books and have formed new relationships with some of the local people who are stepping forward with offers of support (and sponge cake).

They have been married for nearly 70 years and have kept each other going through the inevitable ups and downs of life with a blend of love, tolerance and, most importantly, with a sense of humour.

They have lived long enough to know that every crisis passes. In the meantime, you have to keep laughing.

When I told my mother that I was writing *Thought for the Day* this week, she warned me not to make my broadcasts longer than two minutes, as the BBC wouldn't approve. Ha ha - thanks, Mum.

Loving Father, what we desire is this:  
That people see not us but, through  
Our smiles and our laughter and  
Patient humour,  
Your love reaching out to those who need it.



## Friday 1 May - Diversity in the mountains

So, here we are in May.

May is usually a great month for walking, particularly extended, long-distance treks. The weather is warm but not too hot. If you're camping, the tent doesn't get stuffy. The ground is usually firm. And, in Scotland, the midges haven't started biting.

A few years ago, I was tackling a section of the Southern Upland Way with my young son. We were walking and camping and carrying our supplies.

One night, rather than set up the tent, we decided to sleep in a bothy, a one-room stone shelter for walkers, usually an abandoned shepherd's cottage. We pushed open the door. Expecting it to be empty, we were surprised to find a bearded man, probably in his 40s, sitting in the only chair, smoking a pipe.

I assumed that he was a fellow walker and tried to make conversation. But he was taciturn and didn't respond. After half-an-hour, while we were cooking our dehydrated beef stew on the wood stove, our new-found companion got up and left the cottage. Outside, he snared two rabbits and cooked them on a campfire.

'Why doesn't he talk?' asked my son. I found myself explaining that not everyone is the same. Not everyone is like us. Some people cope with life differently.

Some people cope with pandemics and lockdowns differently.



Heavenly Father, we are together,  
Your people, one people,  
Bound together in Your love.  
Help us to cherish the diversity of  
difference  
When we come across it.

## Saturday 2 May - Joy in sacrifice

The other day, I was thinking about the parables of Christ. It happens occasionally.

When I was young, my favourite parable was the one Jesus tells about a farmer who is ploughing a field when his plough hits something hard. It turns out to be buried treasure (very exciting to a small boy).

Unfortunately, it was the law in those days that the farmer had to buy the field to own the treasure and, to do this, he had to sell all his possessions to raise enough money for the purchase.

It is, of course, an allegory for the Kingdom of God; we all have to give up things to gain entry. As a boy, I went through a list of things in my life that God might want me to forfeit, but I really didn't have a clue. Would God really want me to give up Sugar Frosties at breakfast or stop watching *The Man from Uncle* on television?

It's different now, of course: I have a slightly more mature understanding of the meaning. Every Lent I wonder what I will give up. And now, in Lockdown, where we have an extended period of restraint, I have the time to reflect on what I should be giving up to get closer to God. It's an opportunity to consider what habits I should break, what new ones I should adopt.

How about you? (Answers, not on a postcard, but a WhatsApp text perhaps.)

As I adventure with you today, Lord,  
Be the compass that guides me.  
Let me glimpse our destination,  
And show me what I must lose  
To gain your eternal grace.



## Sunday 3 May 2020 - God in our midst

We want for nothing  
When we listen to our God,  
His gentle whisper  
Breaks through  
The storms of life.

We want for nothing  
When we rely upon our God,  
His grace is enough  
To bring healing  
Into broken lives.

We want for nothing  
In the service of our God,  
Blessing others  
Through our lives  
So we are blessed.

We want for nothing  
In the worship of our God,  
His Holy Spirit  
The comforter  
Will satisfy our souls.

