

Thought for the Day: 26 April–2 May 2021

by Phil Probert

Monday 26th



In stark contrast to the sense of calm and normality returning here in the UK, Covid-19 is wreaking havoc in places such as India with a record surge in cases.

It's distressing to see the chaos we are witnessing on the news; I can't imagine the fear and heartache for those in the midst of it. Delhi has been described as 'a city where breathing has become a luxury'.

While reports are indeed depressing, there are examples of hope. India Today broadcast a report on 22 April showing how temples, mosques and churches have been transformed into hospitals. The Swami Narayan Temple, for example, now houses 500 beds and oxygen cylinders: "A reminder to all communities that we are together in the fight against an invisible enemy".

Countries all over the world, including the UK, are sending urgent supplies to India, but there are many other places where treatment and vaccinations are desperately needed.

Is there anything WE can do?

As Alan and Wendy wrote to us in their letter a month ago: *'There will be no safety for us all until most of the world is vaccinated, but more importantly there must be an equal*

sharing of the vaccine for humanitarian reasons and because Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me" (Matthew 25. 40).'

The Church of England is supporting VaccinAid, an initiative of Unicef UK to crowdfund the biggest vaccination drive in history. There's more information on the campaign at www.vaccinaid.org or www.unicef.org.uk

You can see the India Today report here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oPN7YnNQd8>

Tuesday 27th

Actress, comedian and writer Miranda Hart recently shared this fabulous thought on her Instagram page:

"Being a bud looks like tough work! It looks tight and gnarly and lonely and a pressure to push through. Though I am sure nature calmly takes it moment by moment, allowing the process (note to self!). But the point being as we move out of dark times in our life, whatever and whenever they may be, it might feel gnarly (good word) but ALWAYS comes to good and full BLOOM. Here's to you enjoying your bloom or bearing with your blooming." (@realmirandahart)

I love this description. Just as we are savouring the spring blossom in all its glory, we are reminded that it began as a compact bud, wrapped up and protected, hiding away from the dark and the cold.

However long our winter lasts, there is a time to bloom; we will emerge from the darkness into the light.



*'For now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land.'*
(Song of Solomon 2: 11-12)

Wednesday 28th

Tuning into a discussion about protein folding wasn't on my agenda the other morning. But Radio 4's *The Life Scientific* was on in the background and my ears pricked up... I heard the

recently retired Biochemist Jane Clarke explain something that, I think, strikes at the heart of so much:

"What I miss most about science is the teamwork. Science is a team sport. Recently I read Adam Rutherford's book A Brief History of Everyone Who Ever Lived, and he starts a chapter by saying 'Everyone in science will tell you that all the best scientific



work is done in the bar'. What he means is, you go to a conference and you hear the talks... but it's in the bar when you talk about it afterwards, when you argue about the results, when you test your ideas against others and people from different disciplines come together, that's where the creative work is done.

"You understand why monks always had big refectories - because that's where you get together, and eating and talking builds community, builds ideas, builds teams."

Wow.

Relaxed conversation and good-natured debate over a drink, hearing one another's point of view during a shared meal; haven't we missed this over the course of the last year? It's not easily done over the phone or via Zoom.

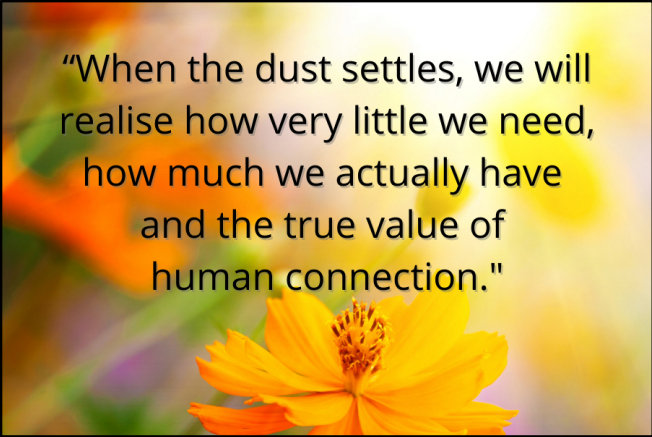
We learn so much from each other and broaden our horizons when we explore ideas face-to-face. Truly hearing others and allowing free discourse - something we are blessed to enjoy the opportunity for in our country - creates and sustains community. It can change the world.

Thursday 29th

Imagine all your worldly possessions travelling along a conveyor belt, each one on display in an old C&A store on Oxford Street. In a building where we normally consume, every object is dismantled, destroyed, gone.

This was the scene 20 years ago when I witnessed the artist Michael Landy's 'Break Down'. A total of 7,227 belongings disappeared; everything from his car to his kitchen utensils, even his birth certificate and passport, deleted. Michael was left with only the clothes he stood up in.

Such a thoroughly exposing and dramatic act. It was designed, of course, to get us thinking about how much 'stuff' we accumulate and how much we actually need. I couldn't help wondering how I'd feel seeing all my possessions on display to all and sundry. And what if it was all gone for good?



"When the dust settles, we will realise how very little we need, how much we actually have and the true value of human connection."

These words shared during the first lockdown seem especially apt: *"When the dust settles, we will realise how very little we need, how much we actually have and the true value of human connection."*

Friday 30th

The morning dance has ended and, as the front door slams shut, the house falls silent.

Before me are whispers of the whirlwind that's now settled: dirty dishes in the kitchen sink; damp towels abandoned on the bathroom floor; yesterday's face coverings chucked on the chair

(did they pick up fresh ones?); unmade beds still warm from their nightly occupants. Each morning is much like the last - it's so familiar, often exhausting... a race to the finish.

'Most people treat the present moment as if it were an obstacle that they need to overcome. Since the present moment is life itself, it is an insane way to live.'

(Eckhart Tolle)

I am learning to be more mindful of the present - even in the crazy, stressful times that are such a rush. As the saying goes, *"Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you may look back and realise they were the big things"*.

It can take just a few seconds and a deep breath to sweep it all up, seize a mental snapshot and file the memory in our heart's library. Even better, take an actual picture of the mundane stuff, or record some real footage of the hurried routines... it may be treasured later.

I recommend a book called *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*. In it, author Ann Voskamp wonders: "How do we find joy in the midst of deadlines, debt, drama and daily duties?" Through her own life, she beautifully reflects the ways in which we can become 'present to God's presence'.

As the pages of our lives slowly turn, may we cherish the precious moments - the presents - in each and every chapter.



Saturday 1st May

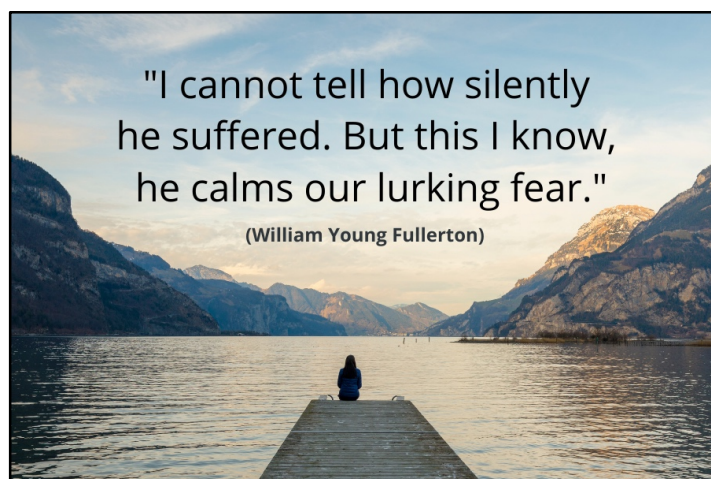
One of the hymns that never fails to stir emotion in me is William Young Fullerton's '*I cannot tell*', sung to the traditional Irish folk tune 'Londonderry Air' (also known as 'Danny Boy'). I can rarely sing it to the end without my voice faltering.

It is a rousing hymn packed with beautiful poetry, and it so gracefully relates this tangled faith we grapple with...

*"I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
nor how his heart upon the cross was broken,
the crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy laden,
for still the saviour, saviour of the world, is here."*

(William Young Fullerton, 1857-1932)

There is much that we can't fathom. But we can trust that Jesus Christ died for each one of us; our saviour is there to steady us should we feel the slightest bit wobbly, and his arms are outstretched to catch us when we fall.



Sunday 2nd

"I'm interested in one thing and one thing only, and that's bent coppers."

Fans of BBC crime drama *Line of Duty* will know that this is one of Superintendent Ted Hastings' famous lines. As the head of AC-12, he leads a team determined to root out corrupt police. And tonight (9pm, folks... there's no boxset binge-watching with this one) it's the Season 6 finale, when we may – finally – get answers to some very big questions.

Don't we love a 'whodunnit'! Is it any wonder that Agatha Christie's detective stories are so popular; unpicking the who, what, why... picking up the clues, avoiding the false leads... all the tension and the big reveal.

In the real world, too, we seek answers and we are eager for justice to be done. We want to know that people are treated fairly. Too often we witness citizens around the world being unable to move freely, worship freely, love or speak out freely. A miscarriage of justice or a crime going unpunished can, and should, anger and upset us.

Those who can't defend or speak for themselves are relying on others to fight their corner, and we don't have to be a Hastings, Morse or Marple to play our part in that.



*'Learn to do good;
see justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.'*
(Isaiah 1. 17)