

26th May 2020

Dear Friends

You may know that the woman who thought up the clap for carers at eight o'clock on Thursday evenings has said that the applause on the last Thursday in May should be the last. It's a sign that things are changing again as the government begins to ease the restrictions that have hemmed us in for the last ten weeks.

Although the virus continues to present a real and present danger the relaxation is a welcome thing. It will present new challenges for us.

I am looking forward to browsing in a book shop, drinking coffee even if it's a pavement table and having my hair cut. Of course, it will be different from before, especially for children returning to school with the social distancing measures that will be required.

When we finally return to New North Road it will be different too. That will present us with another learning curve that will call for respect, ingenuity and common sense.

One day we will be able to stop spatial distancing. Perhaps we will experience a sense of liberation like that I remember people in Belfast feeling when they no longer had to open their bags to show their wasn't an explosive device hidden there, when they were shopping in the city centre. This was something that had become routine. In similar ways behaviour that would have seemed usual and even eccentric to us before this crisis has become routine because it saves lives. It may seem equally strange when we stop behaving in these ways and feel confident about shaking hands, welcoming someone to our homes or standing close to other people when we are queuing.

I hope there will be day of national thanksgiving when we are sure the pandemic is over and we can honour all who have served and sacrificed so much for everyone else and remember with gratitude the people we couldn't mourn as we would have liked. On that day we might remember the words of Isaiah. 'Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing into Zion and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Isaiah 35 vs 10.

That is for the good future but now I hope we will continue to be very mindful of people serving in the NHS and in the care of our most vulnerable neighbours. Let us pray to for people developing testing and tracing facilities and who are seeking a vaccine or other antiviral drugs.

Last of all I wanted to say that one of the things I am missing is visiting people.

As we go forwards, I am happy to come and sit outside your front door with my folding chair and a flask of my own tea and talk and pray for you if you would like a visit. My number is 07852 490034. My email is rmijanes@aol.com .

We will keep you informed about plans to eventually reopen the church but do stay connected in the meanwhile, via zoom, what's ap, email, the post or a phone call.

Your friend and pastor

Mark