



DURHAM  
CATHEDRAL

THE SHRINE OF ST CUTHBERT

# Praying Together

*Special Edition*

*Holy Week Compline Addresses*

*During this time of great anxiety and uncertainty, we want to stay in touch with our regular worshippers and indeed everyone who is associated with the Cathedral family.*

*Praying Together is a resource for your reflection and prayers and is published every week online. It sits alongside the streaming of services from the homes of the clergy at Durham Cathedral.*

*In this special issue, you can read the three addresses which were delivered as part of Compline of the Monday to Wednesday of Holy Week.*

*Please be assured that you are firmly in our thoughts and prayers, and please pray for us at this very difficult and worrying time.*

*Embracing Isolation:*

*Wisdom from the Christian Tradition*

*Monday of Holy Week: The Reverend Canon Charlie Allen – Living Simply*

During these days of Coronavirus, church buildings, like many public places, are closed – and so in this Holy Week the clergy are offering reflections and services from their homes. In doing so, we wish to take the opportunity to engage with the situation the world finds itself in at this time. And so our theme is ‘Embracing Isolation: Wisdom from the Christian tradition’. Within this, tonight we reflect especially on what it means to ‘Live Simply’ - something I suspect we can all identify with at a time in which life is stripped back and we are, for a large part, confined to our homes. In our family, we are currently living the experience of self-isolation and it’s been a learning curve. We can’t pop to the supermarket, so we are reliant on friends bringing us the basic essentials of life and learning to get by on that. We can’t go out, so we spend time in the garden each day appreciating the steady arrival of spring. We can’t meet with friends for social engagements so instead we write letters to them, speak on the phone, and spend time together as a family. We can’t physically attend work or school so we inhabit both at home, with time emerging around them for reading, for prayer, for cooking, for simply daring to be. Life has

acquired a different rhythm, it is lived at a different pace—less rushed, more grounded. We have begun to embrace simplicity. The last time I can remember embracing simplicity to such an extent was on a pilgrimage: a pilgrimage involving a significant amount of walking each day, with everything we needed for the journey carried on our backs. When I packed my rucksack before I set out, I thought I had prepared well, packed just enough. But, as I walked my first few miles along dusty stony paths, I realised that I had brought too much. The extra clothes were discarded – all I needed was one set on and another drying after a wash, flapping in the sun on the back of my rucksack. The spare food was gifted to others to lighten the load – I learnt to make do with enough for the day. As my feet moved ahead mile after mile, I settled into a new rhythm, seeing the world around me as if it were for the first time, noticing its detail, its beauty, its colour. Encounters with people along the way were meaningful, not rushed. Even sleep took on a new dimension – a gift to a tired body seeking to be renewed before the sunrise. There was a beautiful giftedness in the simplicity of life.

Pilgrimage strips life back to the essentials, just as self-isolation and lockdown can. It is in the stripping back that we discover what we really need, what we really value – and what we can let go of. But there is a challenge in this. It's relatively easy to embrace simplicity on a pilgrimage, when our backpack is heavy and we want to lighten the load. It's relatively easy to embrace simplicity when we are in lockdown, as the circumstances around demand it. But what happens when the Coronavirus ceases to dominate our landscape and life returns to its usual patterns. Will we hop back into our old ways, or will we have been changed en route? Will the wisdom of simplicity be disregarded, forgotten, or will it have shaped and formed us for the better? I hope it will be the latter.

I hope that we will have learned something of what it means to have enough, rather than striving for more and more. I hope that we will have learned about the importance of valuing those whom we love, rather than dashing by without really engaging. I hope that we will have learned not to fill our lives with busyness, but instead to pause and wonder at the splendour of God's creation. I hope that we will have learned not to be too independent, because we need one another.

Jesus knew all about this radical simplicity, about its ability to draw us closer to God, to free us to embrace life as a gift. He knew it because he lived it – carrying no more than he needed for the day, pausing on his way to give time to conversations and encounters, resisting the pressure to seek success, power or wealth, rejoicing in the opportunity to sit in the silence before God and to be shaped by it. The prophets knew it too. Think of Micah's insight: 'What does the Lord require of you but to do

justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.' To embrace simplicity is to discover that life itself is a gift from God. And there can be no more joyful discovery than that. Because if life is a gift, then it is to be shared, it is to be rejoiced in, and we are freed from the burdens of consuming, of acquiring status, of storing up possessions that do not add worth to our lives. These times can remind us of that. As we retreat into our homes, we can learn to breathe again, to remember how precious life is, to ponder what it means to use it well, to reconnect with the God who loved us into being. What an opportunity we have this Holy Week.

T.S. Eliot put it far better than I ever could in 'Little Gidding', his final poem in the 'Four Quartets'. So I'll let him have the last word: *Quick now, here, now, always - A condition of complete simplicity (Costing not less than everything) and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.*

## *Embracing Isolation: Wisdom from the Christian Tradition*

*Tuesday of Holy Week: The Reverend Canon Michael Everitt: Discovering Silence*

To speak about Silence, is by its very nature to enter into a tension. A couple of months ago, I led a quiet day at a Roman Catholic retreat house in the heart of Manchester. The date chosen was 29 February and so I spoke about 'time'. The expectation was for me to give three short talks and a reflection during the midday service. My comment was, that seemed a lot of words in a Quiet Day. Less surely is more when engaging with silence. Archbishop Michael Ramsey, beloved of here, powerfully wrote, 'the only initiation into silence is silence. And when the silence is continuous it ceases to be merely negative-not talking- and it begins to have the quality of depth.'

One of my favourite books on art is a meditation on colour. Each page is simply a different colour with raised features on it and braille. As a non-Braille reader, there is a translation, which celebrates the other four senses: textures, noises, smells and even tastes that colours evoke. It enables a different engagement of the senses and one sees in a whole new way. Robert Rauschenberg with his White Paintings in 1951 took this in a different direction. The canvas was carefully painted white and whilst it initially seemed a blank canvas, all the ambient light would play upon it. The viewer's own emotional state would guide an engagement with it. The silence of the image helped frame a context. John Cage's 4'33" composed in 1952 was shaped by his encounter with the White Paintings. He had explored this in a lecture in the late 40s. He wanted

a piece of uninterrupted silence that he could sell to Muzak (the purveyors of background music). Its title was to be 'Silent Prayer'. As a piece it forces the audience to hear that which is present. As I was writing this, there was the constant drone of the water over the weir on the Wear. This was overlaid with the high ticking of a clock, the creaking of doors and then a whole opera-like set of conversations of birdsong. Some of which I recognised, most of which I just rejoiced in the quality and diversity. Cage's composition lifts that which I either ignore or fail to recognise into my consciousness. As with any work of art, I cannot engage with the world in the same way again. Radio 3 last year (5 April 2019) shared 'The Cathedral' in its slow radio series. Its description was: 'The evocative sounds of Durham Cathedral recorded in a single day. Huge spaces in a remarkable 12<sup>th</sup> century building, the 300-year-old bells and quiet moments in smaller spaces.'

It resonated with me as I prepared to become part of you and like a fine meal I keep returning to memories formed by its flavours. It has been interesting that so many people have commented on the sounds of the Cathedral in our live-streaming of services: the bells, the bird-song, the stillness and the river.

Silence, stillness, rest and peace are all concepts that are at the core of our faith. From the very beginning of God seeing that creation is good and resting on the seventh day and hallowing it, there is an honouring of that which comes not directly from activity but from rest. God in the stillness and the quiet is celebrated in the poetry of the psalms and also in the drama of Elijah's life. 1 Kings 19. 9-18 has Elijah running for his life for 40 days and hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb. The Lord passes by: there is a powerful wind, an earthquake, a fire and then 'a gentle whisper' in which is found God.

To find God in that gentle whisper, one must obey part of the rule of St Benedict and 'Listen.' The noise of daily life, especially as for Elijah, when we find ourselves immersed in difficulties, tumult and activity is that we only notice and engage with the loud and the dramatic. Our attention is forced into a conversation of almost ever-increasing volume. To listen for the whisper of God is both hard, and to recognise what it is, almost unreachable.

Jesus is shown in St John's Gospel to be the incarnate Word of God. However, as the Dean reminded us at Christmas 2019, for him to be born as an infant, is for the Word to become one who is 'unable to speak.' At the very moment that humanity sees the presence of God, it is in the silent babe. Throughout his ministry there are to be times when Jesus is silent: either escaping from the crowds and their expectations to be alone with his Father in prayer or silent as people speak around him. Most clearly in his interrogation by the Chief Priest and Pilate (examples: Matthew 26. 63, Chapter 27

and John 14. 30) Jesus is shown to be like the suffering servant in Isaiah who 'will not cry out or raise his voice, nor make his voice heard in the street.' (Isaiah 42. 2) and 'he was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth.' (Isaiah 53. 7).

This total immersion into our human condition, includes both the wrestling through the silence of the night in Gethsemane to the painful cry of the seeming silence of God through the psalms of 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.' An encounter of silence that we all know and is shown to be known within the mystery of the Trinity. This is no easy silence but one that knows despair. A silence that then includes the tomb of a stranger and the tears of friends. This entering into painful Silence is not easy. Elie Wiesel in 'Night', recollecting his sense of abandonment by God in Auschwitz put it like this: 'Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprive me, for all eternity of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust.' Phrases I heard read out whilst looking on the death pits in Auschwitz as the sun set on the snow-covered landscape and no sound, not even that of foot on snow, or birdsong, or life.

As Christians we believe that even this silence is then transformed. The 'dark night of the soul' is the engagement with these times of silence and in then finding where God, life and love is. Silence in that way of negation, of absence is not ignored but embraced. Karl Rahner SJ, in 'Encounters with Silence' makes it clear that, 'Silence is the framework of my faith, the boundless space where my love finds the strength to believe in your love.' St Benedict in developing his rule ensured that this was a space for silence in life and to strive for it for it schools us in life and community. By listening, we encounter and respond; focused and framed on true reality, ones who hear eternity and life.

### *Embracing Isolation:*

### *Wisdom from the Christian Tradition*

*The Reverend Canon Simon Oliver: Living in Community*

Throughout his ministry around Galilee, Jesus taught his disciples how to share life by inviting them to share God's life through him. This meant learning to serve others, comfort others, forgive others, delight in others, see the deep mystery of God in others. Likewise, it meant learning to be served by others, to be comforted, to be forgiven, to be the source of others' delight. The community into which Jesus

called his disciples was utterly radical. He welcomed people who were of no worth and no interest to others: the sick, the poor, children, ordinary fishermen working on the Galilee, widows with no hope, fraudsters, and the world's failures. Jesus called sinners like me and you into a community of life and love.

Jesus taught about the community to which he called everyone. When a lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" he replied "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." These two commandments are at the heart of the community to which Jesus called his disciples. That new community received its most profound expression in this week of Christ's betrayal and death, when he shared the Passover with his disciples. He broke bread and shared wine. In doing so, Christ handed over his life into that new community: 'this is my body', he said, 'this is my blood'. This communion, this new community, is received, renewed and celebrated in every Eucharist. It's a communion in the life of God through Jesus Christ's gift of himself, the bread of life, by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Whilst Jesus formed the new community of God's life and love, he knew how fragile that community would be. So many aspects of the human experience work against the formation of true community and drive us into isolation: pride, arrogance, envy, fear, divisions of wealth, privilege and culture. One common human experience which drives people apart is illness. Patients, healthcare professionals and chaplains often point out that one of the most terrible and challenging aspects of chronic and life-limiting illnesses is loneliness. The experience of such illness is alienating because it delivers a set of experiences, a narrative of life, that is almost impossible to share. Faced with a patient in pain or distress, or with little hope of recovery, I cannot experience that person's pain *as mine*. Sickness and pain, whether physical or psychological, can drive us into the darkest labyrinths of isolation and loneliness.

Overcoming the isolation, the ostracization, the fear of illness, is a central aspect of Jesus' ministry of healing. He overcomes the shame of the leper, the despair of the paralysed, the helplessness of the blind, the terror of people gripped by demons of the mind, the exhaustion of the haemorrhaging woman. He overcomes these illnesses which isolate the sick and generate such fear in others. He brings life. In fact, the word that we translate 'salvation' in the Bible is the same as the word 'health'. To save is to heal humanity of all those illnesses of body and soul which drive us apart from each other and separate us from God.

This is why care for the sick and dying has always been part of Christian faith and practice: it was central to Jesus' ministry and the work of salvation. The work of care

and healing was part of the life of Durham Cathedral when it was a monastery before the Reformation. The monks of Durham Priory lived under the Rule of St. Benedict, the sixth century founder of Western monasticism, and our life continues to be influenced by Benedict's Rule. He writes that 'The care of the sick is to be given priority over everything else, so that they are indeed served as Christ would be served, since he said of himself, 'I was sick and you visited me.'" So it's no surprise that Durham Priory had an infirmary – the thirteenth century building just next door to where I'm currently sitting.

We are now in the grip of a worldwide illness, a pandemic, which has driven us apart and into isolation. This can be an opportunity to live a different kind of life centred on home and family. For some of us, it's a time of relief from the fever of the workplace, perhaps to spend more time in quiet solitude and learn again the value of life beyond travel and shopping. The benefits to the environment are already tangible. Thanks to technology, there are new ways to stay in touch with friends, colleagues and wider family. When the experience of the coronavirus is behind us, we may decide to live quite different lives and work in new ways. Who knows? For now, however, the virus fractures human community in multiple ways.

For a large section of the population told to stay at home, the virus is a hypothetical or mild illness. For others, it is real and life-threatening. A large portion of the population works from home or cannot work, whilst another portion of the population works longer hours to supply the basic daily needs of the population. Some people will be financially secure, others will lost business they have spent years or decades building up. Despite government intervention, many jobs will disappear, and unemployment will rise dramatically. Staff in the NHS are facing the greatest challenge of their professional lives and many will risk their own health and well-being to care for others. For some, life at home is peaceful and quiet; for others, domestic life is stifling, fraught and potentially dangerous. To all intents and purposes this country, and many others, is on a kind of life-support system. Whilst we may be thankful for the technology which helps us to work from home and enables us to keep in touch even whilst we're isolated, we cannot engineer community. It may seem efficient not to have to commute to work or travel to a meeting, but we will surely soon learn that sharing life face-to-face is integral to those aspects of human life and work that we treasure most deeply. It's certainly integral to Christian communion.

Community is fragile; it is especially fragile at this time when the vast majority of Christians cannot receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. Christ knew the fragility of human community. Immediately after he shared the Passover with his

disciples, St Luke tells us the disciples began to quarrel amongst themselves about who would be the greatest. The community that Jesus formed was immediately broken by Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial. Having formed a community, Jesus was immediately alone – alone in despair in the Garden of Gethsemane, alone before the Chief Priest and religious leaders, alone before a furious, baying crowd, alone before Pilate, alone in death. Yet in his resurrection, Christ triumphed over all those forces that separate us from one another and from God. He invited us into an unbreakable and eternal communion with God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That promise, that covenant, is given to us again and for eternity, "for neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." As you sleep tonight, pray that we may trust in God's loving purposes. Pray for the frightened, the sick, the bereaved, the exhausted, that he will deliver us into a new day and, at the last, into an eternal communion of life and love.

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*The office hymn at Compline:*

Before the ending of the day,  
Creator of the world we pray,  
That with thy wonted favour thou  
Wouldst be our guard and keeper now.

From all ill dreams defend our eyes,  
From nightly fears and fantasies;  
Tread underfoot our ghostly foe,  
That no pollution we may know.

O Father, that we ask be done,  
Through Jesus Christ, thine only Son;  
Who, with the Holy Ghost and thee,  
Doth live and reign eternally. Amen.

*Latin, translated by John Mason Neale*

*mode viii*

**Another special issue of *Praying Together* will include the Good Friday addresses from The Three Hours. You can find it on the cathedral website: [www.durhamcathedral.co.uk](http://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk)**