

PANDEMIC AWAKENINGS – Week 1



Lights in the Darkness

As an initiative in response to the Corona Virus, daily postings, entitled *Lights in the Darkness*, will be made from Our Lady's Island by way of social media. These will be of a reflective nature and written to help guide us through these difficult times. There will be important lessons to learn along the way and hopefully we will emerge stronger than ever. You may like to share these short but encouraging messages with your friends as a form of solidarity, support and to lift their spirits. Also your comments will be appreciated and where appropriate will be used to guide the content for each day.

A Stormy Crossing – Day 1

We stand at a defining moment in our history that we sense will not leave us as it finds us. It feels as if we are embarking on a perilous voyage where we have every reason to be concerned at personal, community, national and global levels. The many crossings of the Sea of Galilee by the early disciples offer a faith rather than a fear focus at this time. They were usually evening crossings when Jesus said, 'Let us cross to the other side.' We too sense the Sun coming down on so much of what we have taken for granted up to this. Like the sudden storm that arose for them without warning, we now find ourselves in perilous seas. Christ slept through the worst. He was in the eye of the storm with his inner center undisturbed. When they woke him he reached out and calmed the raging sea. His inner peace radiated stillness even to the waves. Then he asked them a very important question, 'Where was your faith?' Yes, they had faith but it was not in him to keep them safe but in the power of the wind and the waves to swamp them. They had shown that they were more fearful than faithful disciples. Hopefully we too can cross to the other side of this Corona Virus with faith in our hearts without allowing our lives to be swamped by fear.

Pandemic of Fear - Day 2



As we descend deeper day by day into this Corona crisis it becomes all too easy to become gripped by fears for our own and our family safety, fear of the unknown and fears for the future. By consciously choosing to hold a position of faith rather than fear we can improve our situation and not allow it to overwhelm us. If collectively we exercise faith it will make a huge difference and even influence the outcome. Here we may need to monitor the content of our conversation because by the words we use we will either be spreading the positive outlook that comes from faith or the contagion and negativity of fear.

From the East comes a story that is particularly relevant in these times. A wise man was out walking when he met Pandemic on his travels. 'Where are you going,' he asked. 'To yonder city' Pandemic replied, 'and there I intend to claim five thousand lives.' 'So if it has to be,' replied the wise man, 'but not a single one above that, do you agree.' 'Yes', said Pandemic, 'five thousand it is and no more.'

A month later the wise man again met Pandemic on his way back. He was angry and accused him of taking fifty thousand lives when he had given his word that five thousand was going to be his limit. 'In truth,' said Pandemic, 'I did faithfully keep my word. Just five thousand died of the disease but forty five thousand died from fear and panic when they saw me coming!'

I think you will like this video clip: <https://gratefulness.org/grateful-day/>

Uncovering our Fears and Anxieties – Day 3



During these times of rapid and unprecedented change its important to adopt a faith based response rather than allowing fear and anxiety to overwhelm us. Yet it needs to be acknowledged that many are innately more prone to fear and worry than others. Some even feel guilty at not being stronger and more faith-full in times of crisis.

Our fears are generally rooted in the past and while they make us want to cling to present securities they rob us of hope for the future. Having been hurt in the past we don't take risks in the present, but by succumbing to our fears we deprive ourselves of what we can be in the future. Issues from our past that still linger in the unconscious find expression in our anxieties in the present.

To uncover the source of our fear it may be useful to trace that all too familiar feeling back to when it began or where I first began to be aware of it. If change was imposed upon us at an early age it may make it difficult to adapt to a time of change such as this and so I may well wonder why all I feel is dread. Fear can and will immobilize us and make it difficult to make the most out of this difficult situation. Rather than seizing opportunities we will be just blinded by obstacles.

A useful anacronym for the word **FEAR** is, **Fantasy Experienced As Real**. It could well be a far worse enemy than Covid 19!

Have Faith and be Strong – Day 4



Jesus said, 'If you had faith as large as a mustard seed you would speak to the mountain and it would be cast into the sea.' Such is the positivity and power of Faith. He is figuratively speaking, not about physical mountains but rather about the mountains and obstacles we encounter each day, even as we journey through this current crisis.

So what is faith? Is it simply belief in God or an intellectual signing up to a set of beliefs like the Creed? Surely it is more like a fundamental attitude to life at every level. When we get up in the morning before we ever adjust our hair, if we happen to have any, the first thing we need to adjust is our attitude. Whether to approach the day with Faith, or its opposite, Fear.

Whether we be an atheist or a believer, we are always operating from either of those two principles, Faith or Fear and creating our life accordingly. To a very large extent we are not just victims of life's circumstances and we are responsible for creating our happiness or unhappiness. Yes there are horrible things happening that are outside our control, but it is still up to us to decide how we want to respond. There are those who have their feathers ruffled and never fly for the rest of their lives. Others have their wings broken and yet learn to fly again. That's faith.

A useful acronym for understanding FAITH is *Fantastic Adventure In Trusting Him*. As we said yesterday one for FEAR could be – *Fantasy Experienced As Real*.

What's the difference between the two?

- Faith expands our world, fear constricts it.
- Faith sees a positive outcome, fear sees the worst scenario.
- Faith places us above our circumstances, fear puts us below them.
- Faith risks the game of life, fear plays it safe.
- Faith extends the comfort zone, fear reduces it.
- Faith makes mistakes, fear makes excuses.
- Faith allows us to walk on water, fear makes us sink.
- Faith sees divine order, fear sees chaos.
- Faith conquers, fear falters.
- Faith creates that which is believed, fear does likewise.

We create our world either by fear or faith, so believing in God is one thing, while exercising Faith is quite another.

The Lord Is My Shepherd!

Keeping a Faith Focus – Day 5



At a time when fear stalks our world and more bad news is inevitable it will be very challenging to keep our ship steady and hold a faith focus. It's incredible to think that a nasty little bug four hundred times narrower than a human hair could travel all the way

across the globe from a fish market in China and come knocking on our doors.

A passage of scripture that is particularly useful at a time like this comes from St Matthews Gospel chapter 14 where Jesus remains on land while his disciples try to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They row with all their might into the early hours. The wind has risen, and it's not in their favour. The sea has become turbulent and they feel in danger of being swamped. After rowing for hours they probably gave up in exhaustion. Usually its only when we give up the struggle and surrender that we are ready to receive divine help. So Jesus comes walking on the water. At first they are terrified thinking it is a ghost, but he reassures them and then bids Peter to come towards him. That walk across the water provides one of the most powerful illustrations of holding faith in a difficult time. With his focus on Jesus the miraculous happens and the water sustains him. Then Peter allows himself to become distracted by the force of the wind and the waves and so he begins to sink at which point Jesus reaches out his hand and helps him up. Here we see the power of faith to uphold us but also the potential of fear to sink us.

There will be many times in the coming weeks with more and more cases being confirmed and the bad news getting worse, when we will, like Peter, get distracted and feel as if we are going under. Yet if we take this scripture passage to heart it will help us refocus on the one who is master of the winds and the sea and again to know the power of faith to sustain us.

**The Lord is my Shepherd,
Walking through the dark valley,
I fear no evil.
For he is with me**

Another link:

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

Walking on Water – Day 6



Yesterday we alluded to the sustaining power of faith in difficult times in contrast to the potential of fear to overwhelm us. We pointed to the Gospel story of Jesus walking the water and inviting Peter to come towards him as providing a powerful illustration of our journey and the challenge to exercise faith during these extraordinary times. There are other elements in the story that deserve to be mentioned that can also shed light on our present situation.

It was a night crossing. During most of our great transitions we feel as if we are in darkness and its only when we arrive 'at the other side' that the dawn breaks.

Jesus remained on land while they set off on their own. Looking back on our times of greatest growth we usually felt very much on our own.

The Sea of Galilee situated between the hills, although usually tranquil, is subject to violent and sudden storms. The unexpected nature of this crisis has taken the world by surprise.

The disciples rowed against a strong headwind until three in the morning. They must have been exhausted and ready to give in. Its only when our own efforts have been exhausted that in the words used by AA we finally let go and let God.

The Jews were not a seafaring race. The sea was a symbol of their worst fears with its hidden depths and great monsters. Jesus walking on the water was a powerful statement that he was Lord and master even of their worst fears.

Jesus' invitation to Peter to walk the water was to illustrate that he and all of us could by faith rise above our circumstances and not be under them.

Living with Myself – Day 7



Enforced social isolation has placed us in the situation of having to live with ourselves as never before and not having any escape route. Prior to this crisis we could avoid that most significant of encounters in a myriad of ways. The issue of how we are in relation to ourselves will inevitably arise during this time. The question of whether we are our own best friend or our own worst enemy may never have confronted us with such starkness before. Having to be with ourselves 24/7, perhaps mostly in the one room, may initially drive us crazy as we discover that we may not like our own company all that much. Yet it was this very self that we were inflicting on others all along, only we never saw it! The one person we have a relationship with from conception to eternity is ourselves and unless we focus on getting this relationship right, no other relationship can be fully right. It is impossible to be closer

to another person than we are to ourselves. Many of us go through life like two people living in the one room but constantly in conflict. At a time like this our inner divisions will surely surface and the challenge will be to make peace with ourselves.



Love yourself – You ARE Loveable!