

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

17:06:2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am writing this letter the day after the easing of the current lockdown when some non-essential shops have reopened, additional children have returned to schools and a greater provision of public transport is available. All of this comes with the caveat of social distancing at 2 metres apart and the wearing of face-masks on public transport - both of which are mandatory. I had my first experience of wearing a face-mask the other day when Jean and I decided to visit the local garden centre to purchase plants for the garden. I have to be honest and say it was *not* a pleasant experience particularly on a hot day – my breath felt rather restricted as I struggled to get used to this new pattern of breathing through a cotton barrier. However I am very clear that if this is something that will help to restrict the transmission of the virus then it is a price worth paying and I will comply. It is also a poignant reminder to us all that one of the ways that this horrible virus is transmitted is through airborne particles and therefore we have to be guarded about the air we breathe and appropriately responsible about our own breath.

I'm fascinated by the fact that in this post-Pentecost period we are often reminded of the association of *breath* and *breathing* in relation to the life-giving presence of God's Holy Spirit. It is the *breath* or the *wind* of the Spirit that brings life to the Valley of Dry Bones – in fact it is only the synergy of word and breath that brings life to this desolate place. (Ezekiel 37) In the Gospel of John, the Risen Jesus *breathes* on the gathered disciples and they receive the life-giving presence of God's Spirit that enables them to be a community of forgiveness. (John 20:19-23) In Luke's version of Pentecost there is the sound of a violent and *rushing wind* as the Spirit comes to rest upon the disciples and they are empowered for public and visible witness to Christ. (Acts 2) This is the holy and life-giving breath of God that stirred and danced at the beginning of Creation bringing forth life, colour and beauty. This same Spirit brings life to the Church even in the moments of deepest desolation and in the seasons of wilderness wandering.

In a period of time that is disturbing and unsettling and a time that will test our faith and assurance in God; I believe this is a time to breathe deeply through prayer and contemplation; a time to breathe in God's presence and to receive the life of God in the soul. This is the very thought that John Wesley holds out to us in the words of his remarkable sermon; *The New Birth* in which he envisages a process of mutual respiration as we take in the life of God and offer back to God the life of devotion;

'God is continually breathing, as it were, upon his soul, and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven. And by this intercourse between God and (man), this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child of God grows up, till he comes to the full measure of the stature of Christ.'

I hope and pray that in this most difficult season you will know the God who *breathes* his goodness through Creation and that you will learn to draw deeply from his life-giving presence; for your peace, joy and hope.....

With Peace and Blessings, Julian