

Lord, may my words be from you and may all our thoughts be acceptable to you.

As we come to the end of the 6th week of the UK Corona Virus lockdown this is an interesting passage to come up.

For the community and congregation at All Saints this passage is well known and been looked at often. What is now called our Lifehouse Project was originally called the 10:10 project based on John 10:10.

‘The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’

While the project, like much of the UK has been put on hold, our hope and aspiration for it, is to create a new building and space to help our community flourish and help the most vulnerable in our society to live an abundant life it does feel right now like a thief and bandit has come onto our lives to take our abundance away.

But if Jesus came to give us an abundant life how can we live that in the current situation.

The problem is what we view as an abundant life.

It has been said if you ask 10 Christians what an abundant life looks like you will get 14 different answers and there is a danger that we take the moments of God blessing with material prosperity as abundance. The Proverbs even reveal ways to become prosperous.

There is a battle here however because while the likes of Job is given his earthly prosperity back at the end of his mammoth challenge much of the Bible and throughout history we have stories of struggle, suffering and pain, yet these people would say themselves they had an abundant life.

This reassessment of an abundant life is one I have had to do myself.

When my health was taken from me and Fibromyalgia hit my body I had to reassess what I could do. While I hadn't needed to work due to my husband works the ability to work and create my art was taken from me. We had to sell my tools and kilns as I could no longer handle the stress on my body. It left like a thief had come in and stolen my abundance.

What I had been able to do when David came home from overseas we could no longer do as my pain levels increased and my energy levels decreased.

While this might not be the extreme of the heroes of our faith detailed in Hebrews 11 which says

‘Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground’

It still has meant I have had to change my view on what makes for an abundant life.

Paul could not have been said to have had an earthly abundant life after his conversion experience yet he often said he was 'exceedingly abundant' and spoke of joy and peace in the middle of his hard situations even saying "My God shall supply all of my needs according to His riches in glory."

The riches Paul talks about cannot be bought, not even from Amazon,
The peace Paul talks of is the peace from God which passes all understanding.

I know I have felt a peace in my life at moments when it makes no sense to feel peace. When I was in Derriford waiting for an operation on my back which could have left me with further limits to my mobility or at worst paralysed from the waist down I had all my intense painkillers taken from me and expected to sleep overnight with my husband in another country and my parents back at home in Truro yet a peace and stillness came over my body which gave me a sleep I hadn't had in months.

I have spoken to many who have had similar experiences including recently a friend who had to see her son go through a 6 hour operation to right pressure under his skull from an issue with his birth. Because of Corona Virus she was in the hospital waiting alone while her husband was living in a trailer some miles away as no hotels were open and her teenage daughter was 100s of miles away left at home.

Her faith was in her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ just as it was with me in the different times in my life.

This new life, an abundant life which Christ offers is a spiritual change. We now look beyond this world to a spiritual realm which is where we are called to store our riches.

As we have seen in the last months riches on earth do not save us from a global pandemic, but we can live abundantly while our usual life has been stolen.

The small things in life are what actually bring us joy. The sound of the birds. The smile of someone while you are out on a walk. The kind word of the postie as they deliver a parcel or the delivery driver as they bring your weekly shop as you cannot go out. The phone call from someone checking you are doing OK.

This simpler life, to me is an abundant life and that is something I have had to learn. When we strip away all the stuff if we have nothing left, if we feel empty then that life, to me, was never abundant it was full of stuff.

No amount of things can replace the joy, the peace, the abundant spiritual life which Jesus has to offer in following him. That deep richer sense of meaning no matter our situation.

And yes, of course there are days when I struggle more than others, but even with a chronic condition I can live an abundant life. It is not the life I used to live but it is fuller in so many other ways.

It is fuller because I have a hope beyond this world, a hope that no matter what happens God can and will use it for his glory. A hope that even in the darkest moments, and as I have admitted before, there is a spark in my heart and spirit to bring me through.

The world seems dark, it seems as though a thief has come in and raided our lives but what if, in this time we look deeper, beyond the usual, beyond the 'old normal' to find our new usual, our new

normal that looks like a different kind of abundance, an abundance full of spiritual fruits, grace and mercy towards each other.

My prayer for us all in this time is that we endure, we persevere, we do our best to come out the other side with a different kind of abundance in our lives to carry us forward into a new, better 'normal'.