

Dear Friends

When I was working in the hospital my opening gambit when visiting a patient invariably was "How are things with you today?". And so, in writing this pastoral letter, perhaps that should be my opening question..."How are things with you today?" It would be wonderful if each one of you could reply "Things are good with me, thank you" but I suspect that is very far from the case. During the last twelve months or more the whole world has been challenged physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Listening to people on television, on radio and in personal conversations I have come to the conclusion that as well as all sorts of physical and mental problems with which people have contended one of the most overwhelming emotional and spiritual results of lockdown has been a sense of frustration.

Frustration arises when things are not going the way we want them to. Not being able to move about the world as we are used to doing? Frustrating! Confined to our homes whether they be large mansions or tiny flats? Frustrating! Not being able to see parents, children, grandchildren, sisters or brothers? Frustrating! Having to supervise schoolwork all day at home while trying simultaneously to work and/or do all the other things that need to get done? Frustrating! Not able to go to church and meet together as a Christian community...part of the Body of Christ? Also frustrating!

There are numerous examples of frustration in both the Old and New Testaments. Right at the start of the Book of Genesis we find Adam frustrated as he searches for, but cannot find, a companion amongst all the animals. Then God stepped in... Then there was Hannah who was terribly frustrated, like many other women have been and still are, that she was unable to conceive. One day she did eventually conceive and bore a baby boy who she named Samuel and who became one of the great shapers of Israel's history. And finally, what about Elijah, loyal to the last, but frustrated after his struggle against the prophets of Baal.

Turning to the New Testament we find Jesus frustrated time and time again, not least with the twelve disciples. Frustrated with James and John who wanted to be important and who missed the point. Frustrated with Simon-get-thee-behind-me-Satan-Peter. Frustrated with the stubbornness of the Jewish authorities, especially the Pharisees. And Paul so frustrated with the Corinthians that he wrote 1 Corinthians 13.

What can we do with frustration? Well, psychologists suggest there are three ways we might deal with it: constructively, destructively or with melancholy-inducing activities. So, if we are being constructive we might make something, plant something, organise a drawer or a bookshelf. If we are being destructive we might draw a picture of someone or something and then rip it up, keep a diary for rants and rages, punch a cushion or pillow. And melancholy-inducing activities might take

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the form of watching a sad film, reading poetry, listening to beautiful and heart-breaking music.

The reality is that in spite of all the challenges and frustrations we have faced, and continue to face, because of Easter we are a people of hope. Let me close with a favourite verse from Paul's letter to the church in Rome:

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Let us continue to be the people of hope in our communities.

Blessings

Allan