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Just a short intro from me this week, since I've also written this week's reflection! I simply want to encourage you to take the opportunity to stop and draw breath this week. In addition to the 'official' response suggestions below (in which I advocate for the restorative and reflective properties of tulips, jigsaws, chocolate and tea), here's just a gentle reminder to continue attending to your 'oxygen mask'.

Go well!

*Louise, on behalf of the wider Arthur Rank Centre team*

## Power and example

### Bible reading: John 5:19-24

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.

### Reflection

I tripped over an interesting video on Twitter this morning. It had been shared by President-elect Joe Biden to announce the first few members of his new national security and foreign policy team, and included a commitment to leading 'not just with the example of our power but [with] the power of our example'. It's an acknowledgement that – as most of us know – we communicate as much by what we do (or don't do) as by what we say.

I wonder if there's something of that dynamic in this passage from John 5. It's a dense passage that speaks of the intimacy of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. On its own it can be tricky to tease out what's going on but read in the context of the preceding eighteen verses it makes a little more sense.

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem and encountered a man who has been an invalid for 38 years, unable to get into the water of the pool of Bethesda when they are 'stirred up'. Jesus takes the initiative, telling the man to 'Stand up, take your mat and walk'; the man does exactly that.

It's only then that we discover that this has all taken place on the Sabbath, and this healing action inevitably incurs the wrath of 'the Jews'. It's Jesus' reply that takes us to the heart of this wider passage:

'My Father is still working, and I also am working'. The 'injury' of working on the Sabbath is compounded by the 'insult' of Jesus' description of God as his Father.

And so the stage is set for our passage: 'Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise"'. Here we have an example of God's power, and the power of God's example.

As England creeps towards the end of its second national lockdown and, together with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, begins to process the implications of COVID-19 for our churches and communities, neighbours, friends and families this Christmas, we have choices to make about our own power and example.

Those of us of a certain age, primarily from a more evangelical background, will be familiar with the cry of 'What would Jesus do?!' that echoed round the youth groups we attended as teenagers. I'd be the first to admit that it's a twee slogan that inevitably provokes as many more questions as it does answers, but we could do worse than pay it some attention over the next few weeks.

What example does Jesus offer us as we consider our attitude to changing restrictions on our freedoms? What do our rights and responsibilities look like when viewed through the lens of Jesus' example? What new perspective on our own power – or that of our church institutions – do we gain when we consider Jesus' attitude to, and exercise of, his?

## **Prayer**

Loving God, we are tired and frustrated,  
fed up and longing for rest.  
Come alongside us in the darkness of long nights  
and the pain of separation from those we love.  
Remind us of both your example and your power;  
Remind us of both our example and our power.  
Give us courage to speak out on behalf of those whose voices are quieter than ours,  
to live 'kingdom' lives now that speak of 'not yet'.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Response**

It can be easy – and all too tempting – to just move from one season to the next without stopping to catch your breath. With Advent on the horizon, try to take some time this week to pause and take stock of the last few months. Go for a walk. Read a chapter of your favourite novel. Plant some tulip bulbs. Do a jigsaw. Buy (and eat!) a bar of your favourite chocolate or a bottle of your favourite wine (or whiskey, or gin, or tea. You get the idea!).

*If you have a little more time...*

...you may find it helpful to use this exercise to help you reflect on the year that's coming to an end:

*Looking back...*

- What one word best sums up your experience of living through this year?
- What was the best decision you made?
- What was the greatest lesson you learned?
- What was the most loving service you performed?
- What is your biggest piece of unfinished business?
- What else do you need to do or say to be complete with this year?

*Looking forward*

- What is God calling you to do or be next?
- What would you most like to see change?
- What about your ministry are you committed to changing and improving? (We encourage individuals to interpret this term in whatever way is most appropriate to them; it's not just ordained people and 'leaders' who have ministries!)
- Where have you flourished this year? How will you continue to make that part of your life?
- What Bible passages have become important to this year? Could you learn them by heart?
- What one word sums up your ongoing approach to learning and growing as a result of this year?