

Fear, apprehension, isolation, social distancing and lockdown are all conditions we are very familiar with at the moment.

Fear of the future; apprehension as to when and how it will all end.

Isolation: a few weeks into restrictions and the uniqueness has well and truly worn off. Are there any weeds left to pull in the garden. The grass doesn't grow quick enough to keep cutting. I bought paint for someone in my house to keep him from getting bored!

Social distancing and lockdown: we're finding that virtual contact is really no substitute for being able to socialise with others. Though I have been impressed with those who have grabbed new technology in a way they had never dreamt to help them keep in touch. We now have a ZOOM congregation who will continue to worship together each Sunday evening and if you want to join them please let me know. For others what I have just said will sound like another language and we have to look at lots of different ways to keep in touch with each other.

For different reasons, the early disciples experienced isolation and vulnerability. With the disciples the uniqueness of our situation is also bringing fear and worry for loved ones. Tension and stress on relationships. Fear of what the future brings.

The bottom fell out of the disciples' lives with the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. Was this how it was all going to end? Full of fear and apprehension, each of them eventually making their way back to the safety of the house where they had celebrated the Last Supper with Jesus.

In the verse after this morning's Gospel reading John says that the disciples kept the door of the house locked for fear of the Jews.

Were they the next to be arrested and tried and crucified? Yes, that first Easter weekend they experienced fear, apprehension, isolation, social distancing and lockdown.

When Mary Magdalene brought the news that the stone had been rolled away and that the tomb was empty, Peter and John broke their self-imposed curfew and ran to the tomb, finding it just as she had said.

And whereas Jesus first revealed himself to Mary Magdalene in the garden, it was not until that evening that he came to the disciples, hiding away in the Upper Room, showing them his wounded hands and side, proving that he was risen and alive.

And in the 50 days between Easter and Pentecost, Jesus appeared many times to them, though their self-imposed lockdown was not lifted completely until after they had received the Holy Spirit.

In those appearances after Easter, Jesus was the same but different.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't physically recognise Jesus as they walked along with them. They only knew it was Jesus when he blessed and broke bread with them that evening. Although the disciples had the doors firmly secured and locked where they were staying, Jesus came and stood among them – not once but twice. Even in the garden that Easter morning, Mary Magdalene, as close a disciple of Jesus as you could get, didn't recognise him at first and thought he was the gardener.

Jesus was the same but somehow different. By rising from the dead he was no longer constrained by physical limitations.

Too many he was the same – he walked and talked, he ate and drank – but yet different.

Jesus was changed by the Resurrection.

And when the lockdown from the dangers of coronavirus is lifted, will we not be changed as well?

As we pick up the threads of normal life once more, will we not, because of all that has happened through this pandemic, will we not be different to some extent?

Having not been able to sit with friends in their need, will we not value friendship more than ever?

Many people have not been able to visit loved ones in hospital, even when they are dying. And what a gut-wrenching experience that must be!

In the future will not family ties and mutual support become more important?

We haven't been able to worship together in church. Someone has said that churches bear the imprints of the past, have borne witness to birth and death, joy and sorrow, peace and war over many generations and so are places of hope and comfort. I hope that when we return we will appreciate even more not only the strength of spirit that meeting together for worship brings but also the inspiration that emanates from our church of St Peter's where people have worshipped for over 273 years.

Restricted in movement for too long, will we not appreciate the beauty of sea and countryside more than ever and work to conserve our natural resources?

As the atmosphere has become less polluted and poisoned. Will we not begin to understand the difference changed lifestyles can make, even if imposed on us by a pandemic? Yes relationships may well change as we have seen the best and worst in people but whatever our experience we need to build on it.

The resurrected Jesus was not just the same as before. He had changed.

When we rise out of all the restrictions of our present situation – as one day we will – will the experience of fear, apprehension, isolation and social distancing and lockdown make us better humans and Christians?

Let us hope and pray that it will.

We cannot praise too much the front-line workers – all the NHS staff who have given themselves unstintingly, the care workers, the shop workers, those who deliver post, refuse collectors, teachers – all who have put themselves at risk for the benefit of others. Scientists, researchers and engineers have working to find solutions. Those who have given so generously to the Foodbank. The neighbour offering to shop, the phone call to keep someone company and I could go on. All of these people hugely outweigh those who through carelessness and selfishness have put others at risk.

In the changed life after the pandemic may that spirit of selflessness, love and care predominate and make us better people. Easter is about hope.

To the disciples full of fear, apprehension, locked behind the doors of their house, isolated and in lockdown, the Risen Jesus appeared and said, **“Peace be with you.”**

Soon they were out in public, changed men and women, preaching and living a Gospel of love and hope. Their lives and the lives of countless millions, then and since, were renewed and revitalised as they saw what was really important in life.

The Queen was a little more concise than I have been! But my prayer now and in the weeks ahead is that we will be Easter people, from whose hearts the stone of fear has been rolled away and who want to celebrate God's love and hope for each and every one of us. Amen.