

On the Covid Frontline

This comes from Nigel Beeton, who works in Radiology in a hospital in the East of England, and who is one of the resident poets on Parish Pump!

During this time of the coronavirus crisis, he is writing a weekly diary of his life at the hospital

And so it goes on, day after day, week after week. I have had a long career in radiography, I started with race riots in the 80's. I have dealt with coach crashes and multi – vehicle pile ups, I have seen plenty of tragedy and trauma, quite enough for a lifetime.

A major accident is terrible for those affected, and hard for those dealing with it, and



for a time everything is very abnormal. But then comes the standing down phase, staff are debriefed, and the hospital returns to normal, even as we reflect on those whose lives will never be the same.

In my whole career I never considered the possibility of 'abnormal' going on for so long. I almost can't remember a time when we weren't keeping a significant distance between ourselves and our fellow human beings, wearing scary

looking kit if we come too close. A time when we didn't have to insist that patients attended on their own but could still have their nearest and dearest to support them in their hour of need. This is one of the most distressing aspects of this coronavirus. It has driven us apart at such a frightening time that we just want to cling onto those we love. Spare a thought in your prayers for those who live alone, who do not have loved ones in their homes simply to hug them when they are scared. But pray earnestly for those who are torn even from their nearest family members when they develop severe symptoms. The ambulance comes and they simply do not know whether they will ever see their families again; do not know if they will ever again feel the comfort of a hand to hold or the touch of another person's lips on them. It is so, so hard for the staff caring for them as they approach death, when they can only relay messages from family and are themselves separated from the patient by PPE. This tears at the very souls of nurses who do what they do because they care about comforting their fellow humans.

It is not so intense for radiographers, but it is multiplied by the numbers that are seen on each shift. Thank you for your applause each Thursday evening, it is VERY much appreciated, but as I applaud I do so for people who go back to work on each shift



Thank
You

facing not only a virus that has the potential to kill them, but also significant and repeated emotional trauma.

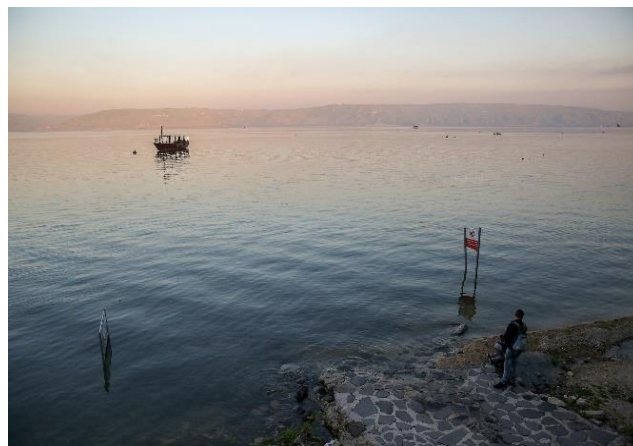
It is difficult, under these circumstances, to understand or even forgive those who fail to do their bit to stem the spread of the virus. Given what these nurses, radiographers, and other care staff are facing each and every day, is it really so hard to simply stay at home? Given what these poor patients and their families are going through, is it so hard to follow the rules?

A Christian survivor of Covid-19

The Ven. John Barton heard Thought for the Day on R4 on Good Friday...

The BBC 'Today' programme last Good Friday included an interview with Hylton Murray-Philipson, a survivor of Covid-19. He had been on a ventilator in Leicester Royal Infirmary, "reduced to the state of a baby".

The programme presenter, Nick Robinson, invited him to describe memories of his time in intensive care. When he said one of the images he had in a moment of great distress and struggle, was of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and he would like to think this was Jesus coming to him and helping him in his hour of need, Robinson suggested this was partly because of the powerful drugs he had been given, "which play tricks with the mind".



Later, Robinson apologised and said he didn't mean to demean anyone's faith. But what he had said also betrayed ignorance. While it is true that pain-killing drugs can cause hallucinations, these side-effects are rarely pleasant. It is not uncommon for patients to become agitated, anxious, confused and even prone to violence. Their physical pain will have been reduced, but that may have been at the necessary cost of mental disturbance; the overriding experience being more like that of a storm, than of a sea being calmed.

Back in the 1960's, it became fashionable for some groups to promote the use of illicit drugs because of the temporary sensations they induced. John Lennon of the Beatles said he had "such an overwhelming feeling of well-being, that there was a God, and I could see him in every blade of grass. It was like gaining hundreds of years of experience in 12 hours."

In his new book, 'Morality – Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times', Rabbi Jonathan Sacks chronicles the devastating long-term effects of leisure drugs. He includes cannabis, which he calls a 'gateway drug', because most of those who become serious addicts later, began with it.

So what was it that Hylton Murray-Philipson actually experienced when he was at death's door in that hospital intensive care unit? He knew the biblical story of seasoned fishermen, fearful of their lives because a sudden squall threatened to swamp their boat. Did he recall their alarm because Jesus, asleep in the stern,

appeared to be unconcerned at the very moment when divine assistance was most needed? Did not his coronavirus-induced distress match theirs?

The Gospels relate that Jesus woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. Is that what Hylton experienced, too? He says it was.

On Being Overwhelmed

The following is from Antony Billington, Theology Advisor to LICC (London Institute for Contemporary Christianity), writing on 'Connecting with Culture'. Read more from him at licc.org.uk

It was Harold Wilson who allegedly said that "a week is a long time in politics". In these recent momentous days, it looks as if that should be reduced to five minutes. In the space of a very short time, life has been turned upside-down. Work, school, family life, daily routines, leisure activities, as well as that number one pastime – shopping – have changed for all of us, almost overnight.

It's easy to see why our nation – nay, our world – is uneasy. You may feel it yourself, identify it in friends and colleagues, or see it reflected in your social media feeds. We're experiencing what theologian David Ford has called 'multiple overwhelmings'.

Whether personally, professionally, or politically, it's one thing to have a single event that knocks us off our feet. But what if the knocks continue to come thick and fast? Is it any wonder we're confused, anxious, distrustful, and fearful? In all this, though, shafts of light manage to breakthrough – the neighbours forming WhatsApp groups to support people in their street, the already exhausted NHS workers coming in for the next shift, the rainbows in windows of houses saying more than the occupants of those homes perhaps know about the commitment of God to his creation.

They're all traces of grace, showing something of a refusal to be shaped by the prevailing culture, which Christians of all people should understand.

Because while some 'overwhelmings' wound and crush us, others are life-giving and transformative. As David Ford says, the wisest way to cope is 'not to expect to be in control of everything', but 'to live amidst the overwhelmings' in a way that lets one of them shape the others.

Christians remember that Christ himself embodied 'multiple overwhelmings' – baptised in the Jordan, driven into the wilderness, tempted by the devil. Then, at the climax of his life, betrayed, deserted, tortured, crucified. But, as Ford writes, 'then came the resurrection, the most disorienting and transformative overwhelming of all'.

Given that death-and-resurrection pattern, what would it look like at this time to be overwhelmed with an assurance of God's love? Overwhelmed with gratitude? Overwhelmed by generosity? Overwhelmed by a commitment to pray? Overwhelmed by a desire to see others thrive, even if it comes at our expense?



STORMS
DON'T
LAST
FOREVER.

Take comfort

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God'.

(2 Corinthians 1:3)



“In the light we are largely unconscious of our limitations, but when the night descends, our helplessness takes hold upon us and make us cry out for God. Faith is a faculty which needs the dark in which to thrive. When we see our way, we have no need of faith, but when darkness falls then faith receives her opportunity.”

(Marshall Broomhall – early missionary to China)



