Clergy Letter: How are you feeling today?

I am writing this letter on a beautiful sunny day when we were able to welcome back to church our Chatterbox Families for the first time in over a year. There was a sense of euphoria and yet many of us admitted to feeling a bit ‘meh’ at the moment. Maybe this sounds familiar.

So I thought it worth exploring why many of us aren’t feeling quite right at the moment despite the rapid progress of the vaccination programme and the distinct possibility that the end of this nightmare is in sight.

So let’s start at the beginning. First of all, I want to say straight away that it’s OK not to be feeling quite right. Please don’t misunderstand me, it’s not good that you’re feeling that way if you are, but it’s not something of which you should be ashamed. None of us are feeling top notch right now. You might be feeling emotionally flat. Perhaps a little bit sad but you can’t put your finger on why. Perhaps you still haven’t seen some of your friends and family and it’s getting to you now more than it has in the past. But perhaps it’s something a bit more than those things we’re all feeling to a greater or lesser extent.

Mental health issues aren’t unusual

In any given year about a quarter of us will suffer from a mental health problem. It’s about one in six of us who are dealing with something like depression or anxiety in any given week. If you’re one of them then you’re by no means alone. And that data was collected long before the pandemic. In August 2019 45% of the UK population reported feeling anxious within the last two weeks. It’ll be more now.

What’s behind this?

Why are we feeling like we’ve lost our mojo? Why are so many of us feeling weary? Feeling down? Feeling anxious?.

I think to find the answer we need to start with the Bible, way back in Genesis. Gen. 1:26 says this, ‘*Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*’ Notice that God says, ‘Let **us** make mankind in our image…’. The plural here almost certainly points to the Trinity – the Three-in-One God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has been in perfect relationship within the Trinity for all of eternity past (see John 1:18), and we are made in his image.

What’s this got to do with feeling down at the moment? Well, because we’re created in God’s image, we’re created to be in relationship with him and one another. We’re preprogramed to be with other people. But since the Pandemic struck we’ve often been forced to stay at home, to keep our distance and to not mix with others. We’re having to live in a way that’s opposite to how we’re designed and it’s jolly uncomfortable.

What can we do to help ourselves and others?

To do something about feeling alone we can speak to other people on the phone, or those who have the technology can do a WhatsApp video call or Zoom some others. But often that isn’t enough is it? It’s much better than nothing, but it’s not the same as being with other people.

To help with anxiety maybe watch a bit less TV news. The television news often starts off telling us bad news about the pandemic with a suitably serious voice. And then there are the frequent interviews with senior medics, scientists and politicians which are also quite often worrisome. If we expose ourselves too much to bad news then it’ll start to affect our mindset more than it needs. Yes, we’re in a difficult time nationally, but the pandemic isn’t the only thing that’s happening around us. Don’t fill your mind with it.

But what when … ?

We might have friends or family who have been ill. Perhaps one or two people we know have died in the pandemic and so we’re rightly and understandably sad. Perhaps we’re worried about loved ones working in higher risk environments. Maybe we’ve found that we are beginning to be ‘zoomed -out’. And I think, in any case, these give the false impression of intimacy; much better than nothing, but not the same as being in the room, sharing space and air with someone else.

But there is something we can do. May I suggest prayer. You might be finding it hard to pray at the moment, but that’s one of the reasons we have the Psalms. If you’re feeling down, there are some great Psalms that can help express that to God when we can’t find the words ourselves. Maybe try Psalm 13, which says…….

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me for ever?*

*How long will you hide your face from me?*

*How long must I wrestle with my thoughts*

*and day after day have sorrow in my heart?*

*How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Look on me and answer, Lord my God.*

*Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,*

*and my enemy will say, ‘I have overcome him,’*

*and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

*But I trust in your unfailing love;*

*my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

*I will sing the Lord’s praise,*

*for he has been good to me.*

Notice how David is brutally honest with God about not feeling good. But by the end of the Psalm he’s recalling God’s unfailing love, his salvation, and his goodness. And David reaffirms his trust in God and goes on to rejoice and praise God.

Sometimes we need to recognise and express our worries before we can receive God’s comfort. And his comfort in times of trouble is promised: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’*

And, above all, remember what Jesus said at the end of Matthew’s gospel: “… *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

As we start to meet again face-to-face let’s remember to be kind to ourselves and each other. We have been through a trauma together and our healing will take time and patience; but with God’s help we will win through.

Your Rector,

Mandy