**A Message from Richard Frazer – Moderator of Edinburgh Presbytery**

The Lockdown is a kind of vigil, a time of waiting. Our faith and Biblical tradition speak of such times and teach us that waiting is never passive, for perhaps it is in our stillness that the Spirit speaks more clearly than at times when we are too caught up in our own concerns and preoccupations really to listen.

For some people this Lockdown is welcome, a slow-down in the pace of life. But I am aware that this is not the case for many ministers, who can feel the weight of their responsibility to their parishioners really heavily at a time like this, even more, perhaps, than in normal times for there is so much anxiety, fear, and grief all around. People look to their minister to be a source of encouragement, to be a strength and to have words to say that will soothe and reassure. Our faith certainly has everything that needs to be said, but there are times when the weight of carrying the anxiety and fear of others can all but break us. A ministry friend not long ago challenged St Paul’s assertion that we will not be tested beyond our powers. I sometimes feel he may have a point.

I’ve had at least three conversations in the last week with people who said that the Lockdown is really suiting them. For many, the stress of having to go out, interact and socialise can be quite emotionally disabling. The idea of government sanctioned isolation feels like permission to stay in the safe zone of home. They have an excuse for doing what they’d always like to do anyway, but under normal circumstances feel forced into engaging with a world that can be enormously stressful. And so, for some, anxiety levels are reducing.

There are other kinds of fear that are building, though; and this Lockdown is producing a whole range of emotions.

For some it can feel like nothing is amiss, we are enjoying beautiful weather, we are keeping safe, we are relishing an increase in birdsong as we watch the Springtime burst forth. But, then, then the virus suddenly erupts, for us or someone close and the world can begin to unravel and we can be gripped by the fragility of life.

Another kind of fear is the fear of leaving home, even after we are told it is safe to do so. So many people have become, whether they want to or not, emotionally locked in, it will be hard for some to transition back to what we have been used to, and attending church services again will be a challenge for many for a long time, even when it is declared safe to do so.

It is so impressive to see so many congregations reaching out online, over the phone and engaging with their communities. We pursued for many years the idea of a Church Without Walls, and I cannot help thinking that even though the intentions were sincere, the walls kept getting in the way. And these ‘walls’ take many forms, not just physical ones.

Now we have people tuning in even though they may be housebound, or far away, or are returning to prayer and reflection from a place where they had thought they’d outgrown the need. Maybe there are some who find the idea of entering a church building too intimidating, and are grateful to us for enabling them to explore their faith without the need to take that step of entering a building.

There are important lessons for us to take on board as we navigate our way through this time of vigil and waiting, for we will have to re-imagine our mission and outreach in the days to come, just as so many have done in the midst of this emergency.

I think what I have come to realise is that over these last 7 weeks I have rarely been as busy. Re-inventing how we can be the church in these strange times has been a busy task. But, thinking about the future and realising that we are going to be different after this requires time to reflect and pray. So I am grateful and excited by the proposal from the Resourcing Mission Committee to hold a conference about *Mission in a time of Crisis* on Thursday 14th May, at 2pm on Zoom. Do sign up for that.

But do also take some time to pray, reflect and wait. For I believe that the Spirit is prompting us through these times. Many of you may read the reflections of Richard Rohr, the Franciscan theologian. He speaks a lot about ‘liminal’ space, about the untidy, uncertain moments in life, of which this Lockdown is one, when the Spirit can work a radical newness in us. So, please take that time and listen to the Spirit in this space between two worlds.

In addition, if you would just like a chat, please feel free to call me or Marjory McPherson. It is good to talk and if we cannot answer at the time you call, leave a message and we’ll get back to you.

With blessings and good wishes,

Richard