

Lingering in God's presence

I wonder how many of you watched the news on Monday evening with a sinking feeling? As many of the 'non-essential' shops opened their doors that morning, I had thought that there wouldn't be many people venturing out to town centres and high streets. How wrong I was. As the news transmitted pictures of queueing people snaking around car parks and up and down streets, my heart sank. Have we not learnt anything over the last three months? It would appear not. In some of the places, social distancing had been either totally ignored, or forgotten in the rush to get inside the shops, and as one reporter observed – it looked more like a New Year's Day sale. When interviewed, people couldn't hide their joy at once again being allowed out to spend their money. One lady had bought fifteen handbags!



Maybe it will be short-lived. Only time will tell, and of course, the economy does need to have something of a kick-start, but the niggle is there. Will people be happy for everything just to go back to how life was before? Has this stripping back not taught us anything? Have people just been biding their time until they can pick up where they left off?

The danger of course, is the same for church. For the Methodists amongst us, we can't open our buildings yet, but we can and should be thinking about what we'll be doing when we are once again allowed to gather. In the eagerness to meet together once more, will we fall into the trap of picking up where we so abruptly left off? Will we reinstate all our groups and meetings because that's what we've always done, or will we linger a while longer in this stripped back place, and prayerfully seek God's will for the future of his church? ***Are we willing to look past the boundaries of our buildings, and listen to the concerns of the world?***

My greatest fear is not how we 'do church' within new constraints, but whether in twelve months from now, we look back on this period as just a moment in time. A time when things were done differently until the norm could be restored. If that's the case, what an utter waste of time this will have been.

Ed Catmull who is responsible for much of Walt Disney's animation says this:

There is a sweet spot between the known and the unknown where originality happens: the key is to linger there without panicking.

Put that into a Christian context and it seems to me that that is exactly what we should be doing. Lingering between the known and the unknown, without panicking. Lingering between the known and the unknown with Jesus – listening with the ears of Jesus to the heart of God. And then being brave enough to allow some things to die, so that new life might emerge. Allowing the stripped back to nurture more heartfelt ways of worship and service, as we respond to the new work that God longs to do in each of us as we linger in his presence without panicking. That, I think, will not only be good learning, but will have also been a good use of time.

So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open, drinking in your strength and glory. In your generous love I am really living at last! My lips brim praises like fountains. I bless you every time I take a breath; my arms wave like banners of praise to you. Psalm 63: 2-4 The Message

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