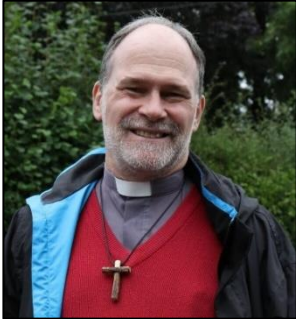


## Richard's Ramble, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020



The lockdown has been going on for a couple of months now, a radical change to all our lives that was impossible to foresee and remains challenging to handle. There is currently a great deal of divergence of opinion as to how to ease the lockdown, and when. I do not think it is the role of any Christian to take on board media controversies and broadcast speculation and argument from secular sources, especially in a field about which most of us know very little. Instead, we are to look to conduct ourselves in a way that reflects the

New Testament. The values of the Kingdom of God are of great worth at any time, and in any crisis.

To this end, we may want to dip into the New Testament with greater frequency, seeking prayerfully to take on board the values and attitudes that are approved and commended to us. Some people who call themselves Christian have gone away from this principle and can easily end up manifesting values in speech and action that contradict the New Testament. This may be because they have uncritically consumed so much non-Christian material from TV, books, newspapers, radio, films, etc. that their minds have become secularised. When such people look upon the New Testament, they sit in judgement over it, and the Bible as a whole, rather than submitting to it, because to sit as a judge over the Word of God in scripture is precisely the opposite of being Christian. These people edit the Bible to suit the promptings of their flesh, often cutting the negative sections, or anything that makes them feel challenged or uncomfortable. In doing so they not only bring discredit on the Church and detract from God's glory, not only do they misrepresent the faith to themselves and to others, but they cut themselves off from the grace of God through Jesus; for the receiving of grace comes through repentance of sins and the heartfelt declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord. If Jesus is truly Lord in our hearts and lives, then we will trust, obey, and worship.

We have so much to thank God for. I often marvel at the lockdown weather; just imagine if we had had the sort of downpours that we had from October to February! Instead, we have had unseasonably warm, dry, sunny weather that has helped us to go for walks, potter about the garden and enjoy the sunshine on the flowers of spring. Those of us who have had to queue outside a supermarket will be grateful that they did not have to do so under an umbrella.

Each day is a gift, not an entitlement. This is easily forgotten when we lose someone we really cared about, especially as we cannot even have a proper funeral for all those who would want to be there; or perhaps when we feel frustrated at the lack of opportunity to do those things that we so want to do but cannot because of the Covid-19 situation. Sue and I understand this personally, as we have hardly been able to celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> birthdays. We also share the sadness of many who cannot have a holiday away from home for the time being. I thank God, however, for all that I have, and, looking up, thank him especially for Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, our rock, our fortress, our ever present help in times of trouble. He is our mighty deliverer, and we have no need to fear.

This is not true for everyone, of course. Secularised minds are prey to all sorts of fears and speculations, tossed about as they are by the whims of the media and the fashions and themes of this present age. People are afraid to go out, afraid to teach or to send their children to school, afraid for their families, afraid that this crisis will never end. While some people have been breaking lockdown regulations because they cannot bear it any longer or out of obstinate defiance, others have been far stricter than they need to be. How different it would be if we all had Jesus as our shepherd. In him is significance, security and reassurance that, whatever befalls us, he will never leave us or forsake us.

Society has been brought to an abrupt halt in its march to liberal secularism. More people are praying, some are accessing Christian websites and engaging in online courses such as Alpha that have rarely if ever darkened the doors of a church. God is challenging the nation to look at the basis for its self-assurance.

From 21<sup>st</sup> May (Ascension) -31<sup>st</sup> May (Pentecost) we have the Thy Kingdom Come ten days of prayer. Let us all make a point of saying the Lord's Prayer at Noon every day during that period and praying for our nation to turn back to Jesus. We will be running an online Alpha from June 1<sup>st</sup>, led by Paul Lawlor. Now would be a good time to encourage someone to go on that course, perhaps someone who doesn't usually go to church, or someone who goes only very occasionally.

The Lord bless you and lead you forward in your faith.

Yours in Christ Jesus, Lord and Saviour,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.