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*On being overwhelmed*

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In these recent days, and in the space of a very short time, life has been turned upside-down. Work, school, family life, daily routines, how we *do church*, 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 whole world – is uneasy. You may feel it yourself, identify it in friends and colleagues, or see it reflected in social media feeds. We're experiencing what has been one English theologian has called "*multiple overwhelmings*". Whether personally or for our families and friends, or for our community and church family, 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 do manage to break through – the neighbours forming WhatsApp groups to support people in their street; people phoning and keeping in touch with not just old friends but also with others who may be struggling; the already-exhausted NHS and care 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 gloom, which Christians of all people should understand. Professor David Ford has written that because while some *overwhelmings* wound and crush us, others are life-giving and transformative. *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"*. For myself, as for St. Paul writing in 2 Corinthians 1, verses 1-11 and 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 13, the overwhelming thing that has enabled me to keep going has been my awareness and experience of the love and compassion of God in Christ, present even – especially - in hard times.

During the run up to Easter, 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, 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?

What might we be overwhelmed by today? May you know God as your refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble

Matthew 22: 1-15    5/4/2020

Today, Palm Sunday, we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. But be aware of just far from our normal understanding of “triumphal”, this event really was. There was quiet obedience in the way that Jesus’ friends carry out His instructions – *the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them (verse 7)*. Jesus also showed quiet obedience in His own choice to ride into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey . That was in fulfilment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 but a major disappointment to those who expected him to ride on a fine horse like the liberation conquering warrior hero that the people were hoping for and expecting to restore the glory of Israel. Jesus’ actions were not what a modern celebrity would do. No grossly expensive and exclusive sports car or bullet-proofed limo for Jesus, our Servant King.

And then the cry started up, taken up and turning quickly into a chant of thousands, that would have been heard in the far side of the city – *hosanna....hosanna in the highest heaven! (v. 9)* *Hosanna*: a Hebrew expression meaning “*Save us....Set us free....We’re looking to You to help us...*” An expression which also had become an exclamation of praise.

Had we been present, would we not also have been shouting our *Hosanna*? Yet, within only a few short days, many of those who cried *Hosanna*, would be calling “*Crucify!*”

How rapidly “*Hosanna!*” becomes “*Crucify!*” How readily and enthusiastically we can support those who are riding the crest of the wave – the winning football team, the popular speaker, the eloquent or entertaining preacher, the fashionable opinion. And then promptly, we drop them like hot potatoes when they displease or disappoint us, attract opposition, falter or simply go out of fashion.

Everywhere in today’s world, we see this yo-yo roller-coaster of alternating adulation and vilification in action. A hard but necessary lesson in this is that if something is inherently wrong, it does not become right just because it appears to succeed, and vice-versa. What real truth and goodness is like is seen in Jesus and in the Bible.

The “gospel” or “good news” of Jesus draws us back to first principles: in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, we see God Himself in action alongside us and the power of His love for us. He is the way, the truth and the Life. May we today stop and think before we cry *Hosanna* and may we kneel and pray before we call *Crucify*

*The disciples did just as Jesus had instructed them.* In these days, when there is so much uncertainty, may we also trust and look to Jesus to reassure us of His loving presence and power and to teach us, lead us and keep us in God’s love.