

3/5/2020 God who shows up in our disappointment and loss

Any other year, unexpected freedom from end-of-term lectures and exam timetables, or being cooped up together in classrooms on sunny days would surely be cause for celebration for students and for school children. But this year, many pupils and students' years have ended with a tremendous anti-climax.

Spare a thought for all those who, whether they're sixth-formers or prospective graduates, those moving on to High School, or faced with no jobs available, and will have no summer term, no celebration party, no opportunity to hug their friends goodbye. Many students had to leave their student houses and head home suddenly, now figuring out how to complete their degrees from a distance. It wasn't meant to be like this. And there's nothing they can do about it, except sit in the disappointment.

It wasn't meant to be like this, in all our plans! And spare a thought – and your prayers - also for those now not able to be with those they love, their nearest and dearest, in their final days of earthly life or to attend their funeral. There is a lot of hurt, pain and anger for too many in our community that I pick up and feel as I try to bring comfort when I continue to take funeral services.

The temptation is to run from or deny this reality: be it watching old films with a happy ending and whole DVD box sets in a weekend or hiding behind 'God's in charge' clichés. But the gospel shows us, the students and the bereaved we know, a better way.

Rather than a God who shows us how to escape disappointment, Christians believe in a God who shows up *in* our disappointment.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews captures this fact, in pointing out that Jesus is not 'unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses' (4:15). Jesus dealt with disappointment too – we see it in His response to His townsfolk's lack of faith, His closest friends falling asleep when He needed them most, and even in His anguished cry to His father from the cross: 'Why have you forsaken me?'

If disappointment was an experience for Jesus, we can be sure it will be an experience for those who follow Him. Recognising there is no quick fix nor on-demand solution may be a way to help those we love and care for to come to terms with their disappointment.

To do so might even be the first step towards a more profound truth: **Christians do not believe that we face disappointment alone. He is *Immanuel* – God with us.** And as we discover that reality, our disappointment might not only be validated, it might be transformed.

Knowing Jesus and trusting Him is a hope that 'does not disappoint us' (Romans 5:5). Because in God's story, disappointment – whether a missed goodbye or a Saviour on a cross – is only temporary. The truth is that He's putting this not-as-it-should-be world back together, as His kingdom comes, day by day. This is the hope of the gospel. And that kind of hope is good news for all of us.