

## **In troubled times: Do not be afraid**

**1 John 4:18** *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear brings with it the pains of judgement”*

For many reasons I can feel distressed about our world at the moment. Spending time with Jewish friends, meeting up with colleagues from Israel recently. There have always been wars, dissent, but over the last 5-10 years things have changed and continue to change so fast. We can no longer trust what we read or see; it is often not written or designed by humans. The horrors infiltrate our private lives, even if we try to manage our news streams. Even worse, our children are not free from the onslaughts of the horrors they can see, and the unspeakable language that is used. Where does all this hatred come from? How has our own country come to be a place where people are afraid to go to worship, their children unable to freely go to school?

John Donne, the cleric, poet, writer, 1571-1631, and his well known poem:

No man is an island,  
Entire of itself;  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main; .....  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind;  
And therefore never send to know  
For whom the bell tolls;  
It tolls for thee.

William Sieghart comments:

*it is bursting with relevance for modern life, despite being almost 400 years old. ....We all have more in common than divides us: the fundamental values and needs of humanity are universal. The lazy or vicious thinking that would leave some out in the cold, that would undervalue their lives based on some arbitrary question of colour or faith, is one of our species most crude and destructive traits. .... Whatever sunders us from other people- whether death or our cruelty or callousness – diminishes the fabric of humanity itself.*

It sometimes feels that the fabric of humanity is being diminished constantly; no time given to reflection, to pause, to consider others' reactions, the images and reactions shared in seconds. What is our reaction – what are we called to do? Hafez, the Persian poet suggests: *Everyone is God speaking: why not be polite and listen to Him?*

Terry Waite was kidnapped in Beirut in 1987, and he endured 1,763 days of captivity, nearly four years in solitary confinement; I have been thinking about him too in current days. And yet he went on to work in humanitarian activities – and to write this:

### **Out of Silence:**

Peace is the fragile meeting Of two souls in Harmony.

Peace is an embrace That protects and heals.

Peace is a reconciling Of opposites.

Peace is rooted in love.

**It lies in the heart, Waiting to be nourished.**

Blossom and flourish, Until it embraces the world.

May we know the harmony of peace.

May we sing the harmony of peace, Until in the last of days,

We rest in peace.

In our times of silence we nourish the message of peace and love, which lies in our hearts and remember the message of Jesus, *'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'*

John 14:27

### **Going into silence**

For the quiet that surrounds me and your promise of peace deep within me  
And the hope of healing for my soul Thanks be to you.  
We bring not only our own weariness but the tiredness of people who struggle this night.  
We bring not only our own pain, but the sufferings of those who cry out.  
Hear our souls' prayers for rest, hear our hearts' plea for healing.

J P Newall Celtic Benedictions,

### **Coming from silence**

Renew me this night in the image of your love  
Renew me in the likeness of your mercy, O God.  
May any refusal to forgive  
That lingers with me from the day  
Any bitterness of soul that hardens my heart  
Be softened by your graces of the night.  
Renew me in the image of your love, O God,  
Renew me in the likeness of your mercy.

JP Newell Evening prayer from Celtic Benedictions