

The prophet Isaiah has a description of the Lord Almighty being “the potter”. Paul the apostle speaks of “earthenware pots”. Isaiah’s text reads, *“There is no one to invoke your name ... for you have hidden your face from us ... And yet, Lord our God, you are our Father; we the clay and you the potter, all of us the work of your hands.”* [Is. 64: 6-7] The words of St Paul read, *“But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God’s and not our own.”* [2Cor. 4: 7-8] I think both of these analogies are meant to tell us that we who enjoy the “call” to be God’s People are both strong, because strength is indeed needed and given to us, and we are also fragile because we are the “clay” of humanness.

In a recent *Thought for the Day* the Rev. Lucy Winkett spoke about some of the personal pilgrimages she has made mentioning Canterbury and the Camino de Santiago. She did the one to Canterbury by bicycle and admits she was much younger then! Many people of different faith communities make a pilgrimage or even several during their lives. I know a person who makes a pilgrimage every year and says “It’s like my annual retreat”! Personally speaking, I have often felt that this period of the Covid virus has been a long, long pilgrimage but the big difference here is that we haven’t *chosen* to do this one. It was just unleashed on a very unsuspecting world. A brave young Chinese doctor tried to tell the world about it and he was castigated by the authorities. Some two months later he died a victim to the disease.

A few weeks before the virus hit us in the U.K. we were wishing everybody “Happy Christmas” or “All the best for the new year” and looking forward to emerging from those dark winter months. Then quite suddenly, the unexpected happened and we began to hear of a pandemic which has wreaked havoc throughout the world. With a pilgrimage there is usually some thirst, tiredness, frustrations, even a hunger for those little treats that we can so easily have and, on some pilgrimages, there can be a very, very long road ahead. Since March how often have we heard phrases such as *“Unprecedented times”, “The new normal”, “A tumultuous year”*? I feel that the prophet Isaiah lived through “unprecedented times” as much as anybody else and hence his little hint at abandonment when he shares the movement of his heart as he says to Almighty God, *“You are the potter and we are the clay”*. Again, Paul the Apostle shows us the depths of his own trust in God’s ways: he knew what it was to be shipwrecked, to be whipped, to be hungry and without shelter and, yet, he could still say *“But we hold the treasure of God’s providence and presence in lives which are akin to earthenware pots.”*

All the evening press conferences, all the news bulletins, all the reports and articles we may have read or glanced at or even got to the stage of being “switched off” by them, all of them have left us bewildered and, perhaps, even anxious about going out to that “new normal” even for our shopping. The scientists and our government leaders have held the headlines but have rarely spoken with unanimity on the question of the virus. Many church leaders have tried to be positive and offered messages of hope and encouragement but I think one of the biggest lessons many of us have learnt and witnessed to since last March is a deeper sense of community – local and church community. During our ZOOM sessions the local clergy and many parishioners from our different church families have reacted positively and creatively and this has been hugely encouraging. Nobody should really feel alone but very often some people do feel deeply this ‘aloneness’. It looks like that pilgrimage road ahead will be a long one but my prayer is that we might be able to use the coming weeks or months to be moulded into the image that God would like us to be.

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