



The President's Covid-19 Story

Rev Dr Tom McKnight

I was thinking recently about the distant past. It was Sunday, the 15th of March, in the year of our Lord 2020. I remember going to church that morning. I also remember that we sang four hymns, each of which has special resonance as I think about what has happened since. We started with "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah", 465 in Singing the Faith. "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land; I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand".



Since that day, our weakness in the face of the virus has become apparent. What we have been asked to do has not seemed like much: wash our hands, stay home, keep socially distant, but above all we have needed to do something the government has not asked us to do: to pray for God to hold us in his powerful hand. The last verse begins: "When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside", and then it ends with praise: "Songs of praises, I will ever give to thee." We face our fears with praise.

Then we sang the contemporary setting of the 23rd Psalm written by Stuart Townend, which assures us of God's presence with us, even when we must walk the darkest path. Our third hymn, "The Church of Christ, in every age", was by the great British Methodist hymn writer Fred Pratt Green, who died in 2000 at the age of 97. Its first verse reminds us that the Church of Christ must "keep on rising from the dead". When we once again are able to gather for worship, hopefully in September, as a church we will, in a sense, need to "rise from the dead". I now have a file folder on my computer labelled "Worship during the coronavirus pandemic". In it I have nineteen Worship at Home sheets, which I have prepared for my church in Donaghadee from materials produced by the British and Irish Methodist churches, for each of the nineteen Sundays since gathered worship was proscribed for health reasons. If my church is able to resume gathered worship on the 6th of September as hoped, I will until then be preparing five more. When we do resume gathered worship, things will be different. There will be social distancing with limited seating. There will be hand sanitiser stations. There will be a one-way system. There will be special rules for celebrating Holy Communion, including standing, rather than kneeling, at the communion rail. Singing in church may, or may not, be permitted by then.

The final hymn Donaghadee Methodist sang as a church before lockdown was "May the mind of Christ my Saviour", written early in the Twentieth Century by Katie Barclay Wilkinson. The last verse of that hymn goes: "May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe, looking only unto Jesus as I onward go." The race before us seems long as we cope with the pandemic and what it means to come out of lockdown. May we look only to Jesus, as we "onward go."

