

A Passiontide reflection

by Richard Brand, Archdeacon of Winchester

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There is more than a semantic irony in that we are all seeking to make greater efforts than ever to stay in touch with one another at a time when social distancing means the one thing we cannot do is touch. Social distancing is essentially physical distancing and, particularly when this is from loved ones, we bodily feel this forced physical withdrawal. When times are more acute, when anxiety is raised, our natural human instinct is to touch, to hold, to embrace as a means to reassure the other that they are not alone, that they are held in more than our thoughts, that they are loved. So what can we make of this?

The first response is perhaps simply to name this pain, this loss; to acknowledge that as human beings we feel this withdrawal and even the ache of not being able to provide such usually effortless, gentle acts of care and humanity. We have been stripped of something essential.

But this is Passiontide, when God draws us most closely to himself through Jesus' experience of being stripped of all essential to him – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And our belief is in the God of Easter as well as Good Friday who is with us and present in and through all things, a belief wrought both out of Christ's suffering in these days and of being raised to new life, with us forever.

So whilst our physical touch has been stripped back, the opportunity to deepen our trust and faith, to ensure we are not out of touch with God, lies in our hands in these holy days. Hands we need to stretch out in prayer to bring God's solace to the sad, strength to the weak, healing to the sick and peace to the dying.

As we strive to be in touch, as we 'phone those we love, call those in our care, and as we hear of and see those who are dying alone or isolated in intensive care, we commend them into the hands of God trusting that each is held by God and praying that each may know they are never alone.

Michael Mayne wrote 'God loves matter. He created it: it is his language. To divide the holy from the common is a totally false distinction once you understand that everything is a sign of the presence of the God'

...who caresses the daily and nightly earth.