



The Lockdown Reshape

No one wanted this, and I hesitate to emphasise the positives too easily when there are people in critical care right now, and families grieving all over the country. But as I joined and listened to the outpouring of cheering and applause at 8pm for NHS workers yesterday, from people outside their houses, gratefully sharing their appreciation for those at the front line of the virus, there was clearly something different going on. In the middle of the horror and tragedy, there was something good.

Some of the changes that have been forced upon us have nonetheless been good. In the quiet on the streets, you can almost hear the planet breathing again. Pollution maps show that global air pollution has dropped colossally.

Last autumn, Britain seemed almost terminally divided by Brexit; today, our communities are as united as I can remember. The elderly members of my congregation are being contacted by their neighbours more than in years, and their shopping is being done for them. More than that, they feel part of something.

Having an enemy like Covid 19 is awful in one way, but its very brutality is compelling us to work together and live together in an entirely new way.

For decades, we have unquestioningly ploughed the commuter furrow, piling into trains and buses at rush hour, and crashing home; suddenly, we're discovering ways that we can work from home. I never used

Zoom before: I'm not quite a technophone, but I'm far from an early adopter. Now, I can see it being part of my working life for decades to come and that will cut down the journeys I make.

Of course, for every positive there is a negative. And I live in a privileged position. For one thing, I have a garden: a crucial outlet when you've got children. For another thing, my job is pretty secure: my heart goes out to small businesses, whose activity has ground to a halt through no fault of their own.

I don't know how it's all going to pan out, and there's no doubt that the hardest hit will be the poorest and weakest.

Equally, what may change is our approach to this. After all, it's a Conservative government that has ploughed in amounts of state funding at which even Jeremy Corbyn would normally blanche. Or, less politically, it will reframe how we see our time, our space, our location, our ways or work.

It's unsettling and it's a long haul and the damage will in some ways be terrible. But the damage is being done on a society that was only half working anyway.

The change is being forced upon us, but sometimes these changes were needed. In the meantime, I pray for all those NHS workers on the front line of the virus and all those facing bills they can't pay. I really don't want to minimise the victims, but I don't want to miss the good that's happening either.

Mar 27 2020 Thought. for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.