



## Playing Othello in the crisis

Have you ever played the boardgame Othello? It's a tiny bit like chess, in that there's some strategy and it involves turning over counters from black to white or white to black. I've started playing with my son. We both know that you want to put your counter in the corners but neither of us really have any idea how to engineer it so that this happens.

And so we (or at least I) dutifully play through the game and as if by magic, at the end, one of us is the winner; sometimes it's me and sometimes it's him. I'm sure there's a possible strategy somewhere but I haven't been able to find it.

I'm finding that plotting out church life in this time of Covid is a bit like this. I know that there are things to be done and that certain things are important, but I can't quite work out which ones they are, and how to plan.

So much of what my working life turns out to be things I have no idea about: speaker systems, Zoom hosting options, Tripod stands for filming, Google meets settings, cleaning sanitiser choices, online curriculum... Last week, I spent two hours reconfiguring the hard drive of my Laptop which had got overloaded with Apps I have no memory of ordering; this week, I spent two hours on the phone trying to work out how an old person's telephone could log into a Zoom meeting and why the code didn't seem to be working.

Worse than this, not only is there no obvious end in sight, but the complications multiply. What we're trying to grapple with right now is return to worship that is both online and offline at the same time.

In all of this, though, I should be learning something. I remember someone pointing out at the beginning of the Lockdown era that we were about to experience what asylum seekers find absolutely normal: total powerlessness and total uncertainty about how long any process in their life will take.

Similarly, by being continually placed in a place of incompetence, it opens my eyes to what it's like to be less surefooted in the world, on a day to day basis.

Interestingly, Jesus seems to have referred to his disciples sometimes as 'the small ones' or 'the little ones'. Some people think that this is a reference to 'little children': an affectionate term. There's another theory, though, that this isn't about affection; it's about ensuring the disciples don't get above themselves. That they recognise that just because they are close to Jesus it doesn't make them more important than anyone else.

Being uncertain doesn't mean you don't try. You can still try your best. It's just also worth being aware that your best is still likely to be somewhat short of being effective. It's not much fun, but it's probably a healthy check on one's ego.

*June 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](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*