



Are we really rethinking?

It's definitely the season for people writing articles about how the nation should change in the light of our Covid 19 experience.

After this seismic shift in our activities, what better time than now to reconceive the way we go about living?

However, what I have noticed so far is that most people's views haven't changed very much. So those who have always thought that the Church has underrated urban ministry and ministry among the poor, have written articles about the fact that the inequalities highlighted by Covid mean the Church must not neglect the poor. Those who have always been fired up about environmental issues and thinning our carbon footprint have written articles about how, after Covid, what really needs to happen is that we pay more attention to carbon emissions and the climate crisis.

And all this is fine, because poverty and the environment are essential Christian concerns. What's intellectually sloppy is needing to preface the conclusion with 'What Covid/ Lockdown has taught us is...', when that was a conclusion that could have been reached long before.

Last year it was the same thing with the clause: "In this post-Brexit world it is more important than ever that..." and then you can insert whatever you want, "We spend more money on education/ we keep the

Aid Budget high/ we import more wine from the New World..." or whatever.

So in what I write, I hope that it is informed by new experiences, and this is that location, the need to be in person, is much more rarely important than we have hitherto considered. It's not a particularly original statement, as so many of us have noticed the same thing, but it has all sorts of ramifications.

On Wednesday, I saw my Spiritual Director on Zoom, and you know what? It was fine; he was neither more nor less insightful than he normally is. Normally, I get on the train to Birmingham to see him, but I don't envisage doing that much more. A slue of meetings, from School Governors meetings to Deanery Synods, have taken place successfully online and indeed there have been active benefits to this method of work. This should have added benefits both of saving time and cutting down on transport carbon emissions.

But it is not everywhere or every circumstance. What we now need to do is uncover the pearls whose beauty is unseen online and only get revealed in person.

On Sunday, I will preside at the eucharist with other people in the room, for the first time in six months. It's a sacrament that is essentially physical. I suspect that this will come to be an example of an activity where physical activity is important. They may be rarer than we thought, but they are still there.

July 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.