



2022: swimming not fighting

I attended a presentation recently (virtually, of course) in which an academic had analysed the language which the British media had used to describe the impact of Covid 19. The overwhelmingly dominant image was one of a battle, of fighting against the virus, of struggling against it, and of attempting to defeat it. If it were a character, Covid would be the alien in *Alien*, or the shark in *Jaws*, heedlessly wreaking destruction

On the one hand, this is natural, but the academic argued that language doesn't just describe reality but it shapes it and she felt that the fighting metaphor had led people into an unnecessarily negative mindset.

Every academic presentation has its limits, but where I think her point really makes its mark is that for a long time, we have been in a holding pattern, looking ahead to a time when Covid is finished, when our foe is vanquished, and when we can walk past the battlefield to a land of milk and honey. The biggest problem with this is that, unless you are a General Patten character who actually *enjoys* war, then all the time when we are with the Coronavirus is a struggle and a problem; it is an obstacle to a happy existence and happiness right now is impossible. More to the point, since that horizon is continually receding, we simply keep putting off a time when we think that happiness will ever be possible, because like a many-headed hydra,

Covid 19 keeps coming back to bite us.

In the last month, our recovery has been derailed by the Omicron variant, but there will doubtless be others in the future. And if there are going to be others, then sticking to the battle metaphor just prolongs the nightmare. If we change our metaphor, arguably we can improve how we engage with our lives as our circumstances present it to us.

In this I'm going to advocate something else, something from the world of swimming. Now I'm not a particularly good swimmer and I don't often go swimming in rivers, but I enjoy it when I do. I also, however, find it difficult. There are times when the tide pulls against you, or when the waves get too large to navigate, and there's nothing to do but to stop and rest on a bank, before continuing our journey. There are other times when the momentum goes the other way, when the tide is pulling us on and we slice through the water with ease.

Living with Covid may actually be more similar to swimming in choppy waters than doing battle. It does mean continually changing plans and expectations, but sometimes, those backwater detours aren't so bad: you get an interesting view from the river bank that you haven't expected. And approaching 2022 as a time for wild swimming is preferable, I think, to seeing the next year as one of ongoing warfare.

Dec 2021, 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.