



Usually the theme for these thoughts comes easily, but this week has been difficult, not because there wasn't enough happening but because there was too much! The invasion of Capitol Hill in the US, Brexit, the to and fro about lockdown and vaccination . . . I found myself dithering, which is an accusation that's being thrown around about the behaviour of our Prime Minister and Government and indeed about the behaviour of the US President, all in relation to Covid.

To some extent, one can have sympathy with the powers that be because often it's a case of you're damned if you do and damned if you don't but, as an article I read rightly said, dithering creates the worst of all possible scenarios because by the time you get round to making a decision, events have moved on and your hesitation has made the situation worse. Like the man in the illustration above, you've sunk deeper!

I believe that decision-making is made more difficult for government where there are populist leaders who don't want to look bad in the eyes of their fan base. Understandable, but when you're in a position of leadership, great or small, sometimes there are hard decisions that may make you temporarily unpopular. I was discussing this with a friend who, like me, had been a Headteacher, and she made the good point that when you were in a position of leadership, you looked at the whole picture and had to make decisions in that light.

This applies to parents, as leaders of their families: think how often you were annoyed at restrictions your parents put on you when you were young, only to realise later that they were right for your safety and future development as a mature adult. Or maybe you had parents who vacillated – no you can't, oh well, yes you can – and know the insecurity that can engender. And what about churches – the guidance leaders have to give? Do we put off, dither?

The story of St Paul's shipwreck comes to mind, **Acts 27:4-44**. Paul, a prisoner along with other prisoners was being taken by sea to Rome via Crete, late in the year when the chance of shipwreck, as Paul pointed out, was high. The owner of the ship and the Captain argued for carrying on, I suspect with commercial gain the motivating factor. (Sound familiar?) After an easy start, the wind changed and things began to go very badly. Paul encouraged them, after a bit of 'I told you so', but then it seems that the Captain wasn't in full control of his crew, because the sailors tried to abandon ship. Paul persuaded the soldiers to take decisive action and cut the ropes holding the life-boats, making it all or nothing for everyone. Then the ship ran aground and the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners in case they escaped, but again Paul persuaded them otherwise and organised the whole people reaching safety either swimming or floating on planks.

From chaos, Paul led the people through to safety. He had a clear vision for the future and absolute trust in God and was clear and forceful in his speaking. No populist, Paul: he had friends, he cared about people, but he didn't court a personal popularity and that enabled him to speak out boldly in hard situations.

As for us? Lockdown certainly affects decision-making, being alone a lot means we can easily obsess about some issues and fret about others. We pray the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring to everyone peace of mind and courage to carry on wisely through these stormy and difficult days.



In contrast to the ditherer, a Norwegian mountain that is fixed, strong. It takes battering from the wind, sea and snow yet it stands firm. Through these difficult times when we are cut off from much that sustains us – friends, family, church – and are battered by fears, pray that we stand firm, making good decisions, calmly.

A Prayer:

Lord our God, who was and is and is to come, we seek you.
You hold all wisdom: through your Spirit you bring clarity.
You hold all love: through your Son Jesus, you demonstrate the depth of that love.

In times when we are directionless, when there seem several good options
and several bad ones,
we ask that same wisdom to see the way forward,
to look beyond our own feet and see the right pathway ahead.
In times when we are uncertain, when what we believe and what others say is in conflict,
we ask that same wisdom to see the way forward.
In times when we are certain of our own rightness, when the future direction seems clear,
we ask that same wisdom and humility to make us pause and seek your calm before we act.

Lord, the times in which we live are full of uncertainty.
We ask the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for all in positions of leadership,
especially our own Government in their dealing with the Pandemic, Brexit and immigration.
We pray, too, for the Government of the United States of America in this time of crisis,
and for President-Elect Biden in the task that lies ahead for him and his administration.
Help them, we pray, to seek a true way forward that will bring healing to the nations,
and to act decisively in ways that will bring peace.

Lord, our churches are full of uncertainty, some fearful they will never reopen,
all aware that the future will not necessarily be easy.
We ask the love of Jesus to fill all, as we seek to share that love in new ways,
through the Internet, through phone calls and face time,
and as we share that love through our prayers. Keep us always faithful in prayer, Lord.

We pray for those who are ill, and for those who care for them –
for the NHS at this stressed and difficult time . . .
and for those who have to have hard decisions to make with finite resources . . .
we pray, too, for those in less developed nations where Covid has added to huge stresses . . .
where vaccinating people brings problems of cost and management . . .
we ask wisdom, we ask peace and a just sharing of resources.

Lord our God, who was and is and is to come, you hold us all in your love and wisdom.
Hear our prayer, we ask, in Jesus name. Amen

Blessings, Ruth