



Liam McGarry

The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.

John 16:32

Self-isolation is much talked about as a way of protecting ourselves, and one another, from coronavirus. Even for those of us who like solitude, this can be too much of a good thing. For others, the thought of being cut off from others for a long time is little short of soul-destroying. Isolation can be a cause of anxiety, fear and depression.

As the coronavirus crisis has developed through Lent, it is timely to recall the isolation that Jesus experienced when arrested, and to remember the enforced isolation of many around the world who are in prison for what they believe in.

There is a stark contrast between Jesus' confident assertion in John's gospel that, even when deserted by all his disciples, he will not be alone, because the Father is with him, and his desperate cry from the cross in Mark's gospel: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15.34) Perhaps the different Gospel writers emphasised what spoke most powerfully to them – confidence or vulnerability? Or perhaps it reflects the difference between theory (the things we know are true) and painful experience, with all the confusion and emotions that it evokes? Or, perhaps it is more about appearances? Jesus – appearing and feeling forsaken, is not alone. The disciples – scattered to their homes, have isolated themselves from God.

It is easy to say, "You are not alone; God is with you." It is not easy to live with isolation from the warmth of human company. However, isolation is not really, or only, about how many other people are in the room or house with us. It has more to do with who is in our hearts and minds, and how we may reach beyond the confines of rooms and homes to connect with those we love.

A “Have a Go” habit: Praying in isolation

- There are different ways in which people experience isolation: socially, physically, emotionally, spiritually. Who do you know who is isolated in these ways? Remember them (in thought or prayer) each day, as an affirmation that they – and you – are not alone.
- Use the internet to find out about the plight of Christians, and other religious minorities, around the world who are isolated because of their faith. Whether in prayer, giving, or writing letters and e-mails, be “with” them.
- We are fortunate in the 21st century. With phones, tablets, and the internet, we can break barriers that would previously have been insurmountable. Can you reach out and have a conversation with someone who may struggle on their own today?



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The *#FaithAndMentalHealth* reflections were written by Rev Prof Chris Cook. Ruth Rice developed the "Have a go" habits.

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