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Good morning,

I'm speaking to you this morning from my dining room. It's hard to believe that just a few weeks ago, to celebrate my birthday at the end of February, this room was filled with friends sitting elbow to elbow, tucking into a feast that I'd spent hours preparing. Sharing food with friends has always been one of my favourite things to do. Over this dinner table, I've enjoyed feeding people, trying out my latest recipes on them, and spending hours talking about life, love and everything in between.

Something wonderful happens when we break bread together. It's in the sharing of food and the meeting of hearts and minds that we can sometimes go from being acquaintances to being friends. In fellowship we move from knowledge of each other to intimacy, a deeper level of understanding, recognition and love. In sharing something of our hearts, we reveal who we are and invite others in to see us in return.

I know that I'll see my friends again and look forward to the day when this room is filled with food and friendship and fellowship. But I also know there are so many people across our nation and our world right now who are grieving because they won't see their loved ones again, at least not in this life. And my heart breaks for them.

The passage we heard earlier gives the account of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. I can imagine the pain and disappointment they felt, thinking that they would never see Jesus again. They found themselves in the shadow of the tumultuous events that had taken place. Jesus of Nazareth, the one who they had followed and in whom they had placed their hope, had been brutally killed. Although as they made their way to Emmaus, they were walking in the light of the resurrection, they didn't know it yet. They found themselves, still, in the sorrow of Good Friday. And so of course as they are walking to Emmaus, a few miles from Jerusalem, they're talking about all that had happened. I'm sure they could think of little else.

In the account of their journey, we are told they begin sad and disappointed, but open to what the stranger who joins them has to say. It is only when he shares the sacramental meal with them that they recognise him.

It's significant that there are several examples of Christ revealing himself, around a table. The Last Supper before his crucifixion is the eucharist we remember in our churches, and after his resurrection there are a number of examples of Jesus meeting the disciples in fellowship around a table, while eating together.

The account of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus is a wonderful image of the journey each of us who has chosen this way of Christ goes on; from despair and disappointment to revelation through relationship and fellowship with Christ and then to proclamation: a desire to tell everyone of the good news we've heard about. It's a reminder that we walk this road together. With Christ alongside us and with other believers.

For me, one of the positives of the crisis in which we find ourselves is this recognition that we need each other. Some weeks ago, I posted letters through all the doors on my street, inviting people to join a messaging group so we could support each other. I've been overwhelmed by the response. All day every day, we share stories of hope, we support each other, we share what we have, from bananas to yeast to jigsaw puzzles to toys for our children.

We're planning a street party when this is all over where over music and fun and food, we'll foster even stronger bonds and be able to look each other in the eye and be drawn into deeper relationship. Like the disciples in their knowledge of Jesus, I had made assumptions about those living in my community. I knew about them, but I didn't really know them. After years of our nation having seen chasms open up between political and ideological and ethnic groups, I've loved realising that in the end, we all need the basics to survive: food, friendship, fellowship. Each of us is part of the human family, each of us made in the image of God.

We walk this road together; our lives are infinitely bound up with our neighbours locally, nationally and also globally. We live in an increasingly interconnected world. Our local community is global and our global community is just a click away. Coronavirus has shown us that our futures are bound more tightly together than ever before. I think somewhere along the way, perhaps we had lost sight of this.

Many of you will have been gearing up to be one of the thousands of supporters who as part of Christian Aid Week knock on their neighbours' doors to tell them how they can support those living in extreme poverty around the world. As we move our efforts online, the need to help the poorest and most marginalised through this pandemic remains even more urgent. People living in poverty are already facing a lack of water, food and medical care. As coronavirus infection rates speed-up in poorer countries, it will put a massive strain on already fragile health systems. This will be catastrophic.

Through our partners and local churches, we're having a life-saving impact where it counts, endeavouring to work with communities on the ground to help limit the impact of this deadly virus. It's at times like this, the worst of times that we need to recognise we are all in this together, that in the end, it's all about love.

Because: Love never fails. Coronavirus impacts all of us. But love unites us all. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope. Love compels us to gather around the table, to stand together, elbow to elbow in solidarity with our neighbours near and far. Love compels us to fight against coronavirus alongside our sisters and brothers living in poverty. Love compels us like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus to tell others about the hope we've found, through the encounter with the risen Christ. Because at the end of it all, we know that we walk this road together.

In the words of Mary Oliver:

"I tell you this
to break your heart,
by which I mean only
that it break open and never close again
to the rest of the world."