

Sermon for the feast of Joseph of Nazareth preached on March 19th at our first Christ Church 'online' Eucharist.

It's very strange here without you and it must be strange too, for you at home. Most of us are feeling a bit – dislocated – at the moment. The world has been turned upside down and it has happened very quickly and unexpectedly. None of us, I think, have lived through a pandemic of this severity before. Much of the New Testament & Jesus' message is about the world being joyfully turned upside down as kingdom values take over and the deaf hear, the dumb speak the poor are raised up, the hungry fed and the good news is preached.

But this is different. This is a dystopia a time of fear and isolation with a limit on social interaction. No handshakes or kisses or hugs. The world is turned upside down but not in a good way.

Today is the feast of Joseph of Nazareth and there is in this feast a recognition that the incarnation took place in the real, imperfect world. Joseph's world was turned upside down by Mary's pregnancy. One hundred years later there was still libellous talk of Jesus as 'illegitimate'. And yet Joseph became a loving, Godfearing father, leading the family into Egypt for safety, and turning back with Mary to look for the child when, aged 12, Jesus was lost in the temple.

Joseph reacted to the worst moment of his life, the moment when Mary told him she was pregnant with care and respect, initially planning to 'put Mary away quietly' when he believed her unfaithful, and reacting with love and courage when he knew the truth.

All over the country at this moment, people are reaching out with care and respect, love and courage to those around them. Older people are taking care not to become infected because their greater risk of infection is not only dangerous for themselves- but also puts a potential strain on the health service. Younger people are organising themselves to run errands; collect medicines; deliver shopping. I even heard of a group in a Somerset village who are planning to stand at street corners (at an appropriate distance from each other) and entertain people by singing!

Joseph's anger and hurt disappeared when he understood God's plan. They were replaced by faithful love, reflecting God's faithful love for his people.

If we are to weather this crisis as a church and as a community we need faithful love. Faithful love for each other, and faith that beneath all the panic and fear and loneliness, God, the ground of our being has a plan and will use our loving service to complete it.

When God capsizes us, turns our lives upside down as God has shown us in the life of Joseph, that only love, genuine, selfless, faithful love, can keep us afloat.