

Welcome to the thought for the week. If this is your first visit, or if you've been here before, we hope to encourage you as we go through this strange time together. For most of us life has had to take on a different pattern during these months, and although things are easing, the future is still uncertain, with all of us wondering what's going to happen next. Especially for the university there are questions as to how many students will come in the new term, what does this mean for the different departments, and of course, what will this mean financially for the institution. This is on top of any worries we may have about health, childcare, families, and that dreaded word – Brexit.

Now, one thing which this year has done is to make us think about our perspective and consider what is important in our lives. I'm coming from a Christian perspective, so some might want to ask me: Where is God in the pandemic, and what on earth is he doing through all of this? Some might say that the problems we face in this world are proof enough that he either doesn't exist, or he is a very flawed and weak God who cannot control the universe, or worse still that he is an indifferent God, who doesn't care about us in any way. If he is almighty why doesn't he stop the pain?

However, there is another perspective. We know that pain can be very valuable at times. It can come as a warning that something is wrong. If I put my finger in a flame, pain warns me that I need to remove it. If I feel pain in my teeth, I know that I should go to see the dentist. Now the God of the Bible is a speaking God – he spoke the universe into being in the beginning, and he is constantly speaking to humanity. But what if we do not want to listen? We can fill our lives with busyness and forget to consider who or what we are. So, at times God says to us, as he did years ago to the Psalmist – Be still and know that I am God.

C.S. Lewis, the English scholar who's probably best known as the author of the Narnia Chronicles, once wrote: "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Does that sound a bit cruel? It would, had we not seen God entering this world and sharing our suffering in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus walked this earth, knowing pain and suffering himself. Eventually enduring the ultimate suffering, dying a cruel death on a Roman Cross – a death which Christians believe is a key to healing our relationship with God himself. This God is not a despot who sits in heaven, and when we don't pay him any attention, he stirs up trouble to get us to turn to him. This is a God who cares for us and wants us to experience joy unspeakable through a relationship with him. And to do this, he gave his Son as one who would heal our relationship with the Father through his own sacrifice.

So, whether you are a follower of Jesus or not, why not take time this week to think again how Jesus faced troubles and darkness beyond those we know, and ask whether God is speaking to us through these dark times. You see, the God of the Bible does not promise that life will be trouble free, but he does promise to be with his children through all our troubles.

God bless.