

## The Dearest Freshness Deep down Things



To say we're living through difficult, challenging and disconcerting times is something of an understatement. Life will never quite be the same again. What we've been through in the last few weeks is – to our former assumptions, expectations and way of life – inconceivable. First there was Brexit, felt by some to be a disaster and by others to herald the promise of a new start. Then there were the floods, quickly followed by the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, bringing in its wake economic shockwaves on a global scale. To say nothing of climate change providing a constant backdrop to all

this. The world – the world we're all used to – will never, ever, be the same again. Even after the pandemic has been dealt with, life will be different in all sorts of ways.

For most of us this is being experienced as something like a massive global stroke. Parts of our life together have been paralysed and we're wondering whether we'll be able to recover or whether some things will be lost for good. It's not at all surprising that accompanying this is a sense of grief, loss and anxiety.

For some, of course, there's the experience of contracting the virus itself, with all its very unpleasant symptoms. For others, the virus will be the cause of their deaths, which will profoundly affect those who love them. The lives of such people will be marked forever by the physical absence of those they love. No wonder all this is met with a sense of foreboding and fear.


Notwithstanding the very real heartache experienced by those undergoing bereavement now or in the future, which calls to be met with empathy, compassion and love, it's also the case that good and creative things are beginning to emerge. If the analogy of a stroke gets anywhere near the mark, then it's the case that we're having to open up and develop new neural pathways to enable us to do what we once did or to find completely new ways of doing old – and new – things. We're rediscovering how much we need, depend and rely on each other and, as a result, we're realising that we need to care and look after one another, because we're interconnected and interdependent. We're rediscovering that while money's helpful and even necessary, perhaps, it's not the most important thing in the world. And we're also discovering new ways to be creative, to do new things and to do old things in new ways.

This is a profound experience of what lies at the heart of our spirituality, of our Christian faith, and of our relationship with God. God is ever new, always present and incessantly creative. This is what the resurrection shows. Yes, pain and suffering nearly always precedes this, as is seen in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. Out of that, though, even discovered within it, is the promise and presence of new life.

This is what the priest-poet Gerard Manley Hopkins affirms in his poem, *God's Grandeur*, that there's a dearest freshness deep down things. Hopkins identifies this as the Holy Spirit – the Lord, the Giver of Life, as we affirm in the Creed – constantly bringing life out of death. As we continue our journey through Lent

towards Holy Week and Good Friday, and as we grapple with the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic in the weeks and months beyond Easter, may we and all people discover the dearest freshness deep down things, and trust that this is the most real and vital thing in the world.

### God's Grandeur



The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; Bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.