



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

John 10: 27-31 'Jesus: Close to Father, Close to Friends'

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one.'

Timely words. We all need a cheery word now and again to encourage us and stop us fretting. A new jet aircraft was on its maiden flight and shortly after takeoff the cheerful voice of the captain came over the Tannoy: 'Those of you on the right side may notice that one of the engines is shaking rather badly, but don't worry we have three more engines and we're cruising at 50,000 feet.' A little while later: 'You may also notice that the engine next to it is glowing hot... but don't worry we're still at 40,000 feet.' Then: 'Now those of you on the left may have noticed that one of the engines just fell off – don't worry, we're still cruising nicely at 30,000 feet.' A little later: 'Some of you may have seen that a crack has opened up in the aisle and you can get a beautiful view of the ocean below. If you look carefully you'll see a small lifeboat that's been dropped from this plane. But please don't worry, because your captain is on that boat and is monitoring your flight to the very end.'

So much for cheery words! The fact is that bad things do happen to good people all the time, sometimes very bad things – war, cancer, virus infection, disasters. So what about these cheery words of the Good Shepherd? Is it just wishful thinking? Or a bit of a pep talk? Our Lord not only gives us encouraging words, he gives us his promise to be with us in the midst of our trouble. 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' Jesus doesn't social distance. He is not remote from our situation but is in it with us. He is Emmanuel – 'God with us.'

From scientists and economists to politicians to media pundits to you and me, nobody really knows what lies in store for us in this pandemic. But what we do know is that, as Paul says to the Romans, nothing can separate us from God's love that is revealed in Jesus.

Prayer: using some words from Johnson Oatman Jr. (1856-1926)

Lord, we thank you for the assurance we sung of as children:

*There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus,
no not one, no not one...*

*There's not an hour that he is not with us;
no night so dark but his love can cheer us.*

Jesus knows all about our struggles...

Jesus, our Divine Friend,
help us to live this day in the confidence that you are always with us.

