

# Messages from Rev Hilda Smith during the Coronavirus outbreak

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29 March 2020

Well, two or three weeks ago, none of us imagined we would be in the position we are now in, basically in lock down, although that is not a phrase that has been used in Britain. The reality of what we may be facing is brought home to us when we hear on the news that the SEC is being considered as an additional facility for those who are critically ill and similar huge venues are earmarked for London, Birmingham and Manchester.

This is something that is beyond what we can imagine right now but it will become a reality for us in the not too distant future. That, I'm sure, causes anxiety and fear to raise their ugly heads but we mustn't give into them because they will make our lives unbearable. We need good positive thoughts to keep us going in the coming days and weeks

The other thing we know, all too well, is that this worldwide crisis has brought out the best and the worst in people. I want to share with you some Cherokee wisdom that was shared on a blog that I read daily. It is on the website of the craft company I use.

It's the story of two wolves.



An old Cherokee was teaching his grandson about life.

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, lies, false pride, ego and feelings of inferiority or superiority.”

He continued, “The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

You may have heard the story before but it is worth hearing again, I think. It is good to be reminded that we are the ones who feed the wolf within us. I had a couple of blips this week when the severity of what was happening began to dawn on me and it didn't leave me in a particularly good place so I quickly did something about it.

I started crafting. I started doing a complicated design on parchment which took me into a much better head space. I decided to feed the good wolf within, if we want to continue with that analogy. My other thought processes re the virus would have taken me somewhere that would have dragged me down emotionally and I didn't want that to happen so I did something about it.

I have also started hearing about relatives of friends who have died and again, I can dwell on that or I can do something positive. I am part of three Facebook Groups. On one of them, there are constant reminders of where we are and what we are facing. On the other two, my craft ones, there are such positive vibes and they feed my soul.

I was going to write this earlier this evening but I took part in an online quiz which the Moderator designate of the Church of Scotland was leading. Martin Fair had five categories: Music, Geography, History, Sport, TV and Films.

I won't bore you with my score - it's too embarrassing!! Lol. - but in my defence, some who took part were in teams!! My score reminded me of what my friend, Magda, said about me years ago. She couldn't believe that anyone could be so well educated and know so little!! As far as I'm concerned, they just don't ask the questions in quizzes to which I would know the answers!! General knowledge is not my subject!! Lol.

Anyway, I am writing this to encourage you to feed the good wolf within. How will you do that? Post your answers so that we can continue to build up our community even though we we can't see each other. What feeds your soul? What takes you out of that dark place of worry and fear? Share your thoughts with me so that we can encourage one another and feel the good wolf within each other.

I got such a boost this week when I found the painting of the Church through my letterbox.



It was from Orla Mochrie. I know others got a picture as well from Orla, Jock or Seamus. What a thoughtful thing to do. It's in my window so if you are out for a walk, you will see it. If not, you see it here. I posted it on my FB page and in the other FB groups of which I am a part and it was a real boost to others who are self-isolating. One single act can have such a huge impact on so many without us even realising.

Maya Angelou said: People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel. What can we do in the coming weeks to make people feel better in themselves? What can you do? What can I do? That's one question we need to think about quite seriously because we will need to build one another up in whatever way we can.

We are not totally reliant on each other in that we also have God in the equation and He never leaves us. He says to us: Do not be afraid. That is said about 365 times in the Bible which tells us that fear impacts so many people. If you would like take time tomorrow to reflect on God and what He might mean to you right now, there are different ways of doing that.

There are some ministers who are live-streaming Sunday worship and you can find them on the Church of Scotland's website. They will be available for the coming week so you have the opportunity to try different Churches! The link to those Churches is below.

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/services-online>

There is also a service on BBC 1 at 10.45 a.m. from Bangor Cathedral in North Wales and at 11.15 a.m. with Rev. Jane Howitt from St. Rollox Church of Scotland in Glasgow and Father Dermot Preston from St. Aloysius in Glasgow.

Maybe see you there! Take care. Stay safe and God Bless you.

I close with a prayer. Please join me in it.

*Eternal God, as we wrestle with fears and anxieties, as we become overwhelmed by the constant talk of the coronavirus, we take a moment just to bow in your presence to remind ourselves that in our changing world, you remain the same. You never change.*

*Loving God, we cannot reach out to each other except by phone or in messages or posts like this but you can and you do reach out to us and you envelop us in your loving arms. Assure us of your presence and calm our troubled minds.*

*Lord God, we pray for ourselves but we pray for others too. We pray for those whose lives have been torn apart by this virus, for those unable to visit in hospitals, to attend funerals, to socialise with friends and even family. Comfort them and help us and others to comfort them in whatever we can but in ways that will be different from how we would normally do that.*

*Lord God, we pray, too, for those in power, in governments and in councils who have decisions to make that we cannot even begin to imagine at this stage. Guide them, we pray, and protect them because we need their lead and we need them to put in place all that will be required in the coming weeks and months.*

*Lord God, we pray, too, for those on the front line within the NHS whose lives are on the line as they care for us. Guide them as they too make difficult decisions which will affect so many people. Lord God, we thank you for them and pray that we will do all in our power to lessen the risk to them.*

*We pray for others who serve us, from the postmen and women to delivery men, to shop assistants and those in the emergency services. We think of teachers, janitors and cooks and carers, of undertakers, bin men and volunteers, of social workers and so many others.*

*Lord God, we place all of them in your hands and in the silence of our own homes, we bring others known to us who are on the front line and doing what they do to make our lives safer and easier without counting the cost to themselves. Fill them with your peace and bless them.*

*Lord God, fill each one of us with your peace and with hope, eternal hope that comes through faith in your Son, our Lord and our Saviour,  
Amen.*

## **22 March 2020**

Well, where did you worship today?

I have just been to a Presbyterian Church in America and what that brought home to me is that what we are facing is a worldwide crisis. We know it is already but hearing one of the pastors there praying for people who are isolated, people who are anxious about their jobs, children who are missing out on school and meeting up with friends, students whose academic year has been cut short, medical, nursing and ancillary staff who are on the front line in caring for those who are sick and so on, really did bring home to me that we are all in this together. There is no them and us, no party politics that matters. We are one people united with our brothers and sisters around the world who face the same threat as we do.

Some have faced it already. Some are living in fear of it. Some are reconciled to the inevitable. Some are trying to escape it by heading here in camper vans. Don't hate those people. They are afraid and are trying to protect themselves just the same as we are. They won't be any safer here and we may feel strongly that they should have stayed at home but they are human beings like us and still deserve the same respect as we would want others to show us.

One of the readings that was read in the Presbyterian Church in America was Psalm 23, a Psalm that we all know so well.

*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me to lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil,  
my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

The words of this Psalm are so familiar that we run the risk of missing the message that God gives us through it.

The shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. He provides for their every need. He ensures they have the water of life and a place to rest and feed that they may be fit for the next day whatever it brings.

Often in the midst of a crisis, we get so caught up in our fears and so stuck in our heads worrying about what might happen tomorrow that we fail to see what we have today. Our Shepherd walks with us into a new day but He is with us in this one. He watches over us. He provides us with a place of rest, green pastures where we can renew our strength, still waters so that we will be refreshed and ready for a new day. He blesses us where we are, whether that be beside still waters or through the valleys of life. He blesses us and He walks with us.

Do not worry about the things that we cannot change, easier said than done, I know.

I love the serenity prayer which says:

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference, Amen.*

Take time to reflect on those words as we move into even more uncertain days but in those uncertain days, there is one certainty and that is that we will not enter them alone even if we live alone because our Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for us, walks with us and will never, ever leave us. Go into this coming week in His strength and He will sustain you.

## 21 March 2020

Hi there, folks,

This has been a very strange few days with stranger days ahead, no doubt! However, it is Sunday tomorrow and although we cannot meet for worship, there are countless opportunities to share in worship with those who are live streaming a short service. I will provide some links to them below. You will be able to watch them at any point throughout the coming week as they remain online until the following Sunday. The Moderator of the Church of Scotland is going to be providing a service of worship from next Sunday.

This week, you can share in a time of quiet reflection with Scott Burton who is minister of Gigha linked with the West Kintyre Churches:

<http://www.westkintyreandgighachurchofscotland.org/>

or with Rev Graham Crawford, Perth:

[www.kinnoullparishchurch.co.uk](http://www.kinnoullparishchurch.co.uk)

or with Rev. Martin Fair who will be the next Moderator of the General Assembly

<https://www.arbraothstandrews.org.uk/index.php/live/>

There are lots of other Churches which will provide worship and which you can find if you search for them online.

There are also talks taking place with the BBC to see if they will provide a Sunday Service again which will be a great help, particularly to those who are not online.

Although we will all be worshipping at different times tomorrow and pretty much in isolation, it is my prayer that we will all know God's blessing and be assured of His presence with us wherever we are.

I close with a prayer.

*Blessed Lord God, in the comfort of our own homes and in the midst of the confusion in the world around us, you provide us with your constant presence and we thank you for that.*

*We thank you that you will never leave us, that you stand beside us and that you will hold us in the palm of your hand when fears weigh heavily upon us, when anxiety takes control of our lives, when loneliness is looming and we are unsure of which way to turn.*

*Lord God, you are our refuge and strength. Help us to turn to you and to know that you will hear our cries for help and will answer us with your peace and your love and your hope.*

*Only you can give us hope in these days, hope of life, hope of peace, hope for today and for tomorrow.*

*Speak to our hearts, Lord God, as we share in worship tomorrow. May we know that even though we are in isolation, we are united with all your children around the world who worship you and praise you and indeed cry out to you in the midst of chaos and pain.*

*Lord God, bless each person who bows before you in worship and those who share in this prayer. Watch over them and assure them of your presence now and always, for this prayer is offered in Jesus' Name and for His Sake, Amen.*

Stay safe, my friends, and God bless you.

Hilda

## **17 March 2020**

Hi there folks,

This is an announcement that I had hoped I wouldn't have to make for a while.

Sadly, but inevitably, the Church of Scotland has strongly advised her ministers to cease conducting public worship from now which means there will be no service of worship this coming Sunday or in the weeks to come in Lochgilphead Parish Church.

This is a difficult time for everyone and for those of us who come together regularly in worship, it will be a real miss but it is so important that the most vulnerable within our society are protected and the best way to do that seems to be to self isolate and to stop meeting in groups. However, our God is in this crisis with us and in a rapidly changing world, He is the one constant.

Maybe the time has come to share with a bit of my journey. I had always intended teaching French and German but in my final year of my MA, I was quite ill. I had a lumbar puncture done and had a very bad reaction thereafter. I was really ill for 10 days afterwards, unable to lift my head off the pillow or do anything for myself. I was diagnosed with MS, a diagnosis that no longer stands but it did for thirteen years. I realised as I lay ill how quickly life could change. I could lose the ability to see, to speak, to move around. I could lose my family, my friends, my home, my

job. The only thing that no one could take from me was my faith and I decided then that it was worth sharing.

Although I never intended going into ministry, God had other ideas and every obstacle I put in the way, He demolished and so began my studies for ministry back in 1984.

Life can change very quickly, as we all know from our own experience, but God is with us and He does not change. He remains the same and reaches out to us in so many different ways to support us and encourage us. God is someone to whom we can turn when life is rubbish and as the world spins out of control as well as on the good days. He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Although we won't be meeting for Sunday worship in a group, I will be posting regular reflections and prayers on this FB page and I hope that in the days to come, you will know the peace of God which is ours through Christ, our Lord.

Stay safe, folks, and if you need anyone to speak to, I am at the end of the phone as are the other ministers and priests in our area. Don't hesitate to get in touch with any of us if it will help reduce your feelings of isolation, your anxiety or even your fears at this time.

God bless you all.

Hilda