

## Dear Friends

Many of you will know that whilst I have been waiting for my surgery. I have had quite a few months where I've been reflecting on what all this means, about what I can and cannot do, and how best to do it. I am sure that many of you will have experienced similar times in your life when it feels like important things are on hold, other people are making your decisions, and your head is so stuffed with either massive amounts of pain, or massive amounts of pain medication (I am still to decide which is worst!) But when we are in places like that in our lives, what do we believe about ourselves and more importantly what do we think God thinks about us?

Somehow or other I managed back last October to go on my first ever retreat. The diocese encourages its clergy to do this, ideally once a year. I am ashamed to say that I just kept putting it off and making excuses. My clergy review came around each year, and either the Bishop, the Archdeacon or the Area Dean would ask 'and have you taken your retreat this year?' Being off work, not really doing anything much, was like a super-imposed retreat, but I did find a way to get to a quite wonderful place in the North East called Alnmouth Friary. I am not certain how I managed to get me and my constant companion (the stick!) all the way there, but I am so glad I did!

Two things stood out for me through my discussions with the friars (a wonderful group of five Franciscan Friars). First of all 'why are you thinking about all the things that you can't do? What about the things that you can do?'. That was a good question...What could I do? And more significantly 'don't sit around trying to make sense of things beyond you, get out of the way so that God can do His thing'. Clergy overall are not good at getting out of the way! We convince ourselves that we, more than anyone else are indispensable. Oh yes, its not what we tell others, obviously, but deep down inside... it doesn't apply to us. Well, there is nothing like 7 months of sick leave (I preferred 'unfit for duty!') to physically get you out of the way. And what was it that I could do?

I decided that I could use social media, and that during Advent, I could go on a spiritual journey around various themes and share it with a few others. I found a great book by Lisa Bodenheim of the Iona Community, called Disturbing Complacency, and I set off, via WhatsApp with a small band of other travellers and we explored our faithful complacency. It was one of the biggest learning experiences that I have enjoyed, and our little group grew as people added their friends. So when Lent came around and I was still not at work, we set off again. We have explored some dark and challenging things of our faith, and some wacky things, we have shared more together and it has been good. We have another two weeks of reflecting together as we get nearer to our remembrance of Easter, but what a joy it has been.

There is a sense of an interregnum being the ultimate in getting out of the way, and allowing God to 'do their thing'. I want to just share a few thoughts with you. Getting out of the way is important, but it is a positive action not a negative one. We must expect God to do His thing. That means preparing us for whatever that looks like, working hard at being ready, but recognising it is Gods busy-ness not ours. How are you spending this time, whilst we wait for a

new incumbent? I think that we should be in preparation, open and listening, doing less but hoping for more. This is not a vacuum to be filled with our own private agendas, but rather a waiting place, a reflecting pool, an oasis to think about what we can do differently, but essentially attune ourselves to God doing His thing with us. So my prayer is that for, you our interregnum is a spiritual blessing where you might have the courage to explore what God doing His thing in your life might look like?

My plan is to return to work after Easter, different, but excited about the next leg of the pilgrimage. I hope and pray that your plans are truly blessed by our loving God, and that you and yours might have a truly blessed and exciting Easter.

*Andrew*