

The View

19 OCTOBER 2020

EDITION 21

Give thanks in all circumstances

A reflection by Rt Rev Peter Hill

This scripture dropped into my inbox early this morning:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Give thanks in all circumstances! Really? How can we do that? I am not feeling at all thankful at present.

Very recently a dear Christian friend and priest mentor of mine died in a residential home. Like so many others, he had not been able to receive visits, even from his children, throughout the whole of that long first lockdown, and very few since. I should have been at his funeral last week, but the latest restrictions made the very long journey way up north impossible. Over more than 30 years we had prayed together, watched rugby together, ate and laughed together and, even though we didn't always agree on everything in the world and the church, remained good mates. He was 'always there' for me and my family, and in this last year I wasn't able to be there for him.



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Give thanks in all circumstances (continued)

Added to this, after a period of increasing social interaction, with our churches re-opening, and leading live worship again, we have now entered a time of increasing restriction once more, with the possibility of a circuit breaker lockdown, as in Wales. What is there to be thankful for? As an extreme extrovert this is tough for me - How about you?

I have to admit that receiving again Paul's words, indeed his command from God, to *give thanks in all circumstances*.... seemed a very tall order, but it has filtered into my spirit once again. So much so that I have given it some time to do its work on me and even read a few commentaries along the way. What have I discovered?

Well, the first and obvious thing is that it is thanksgiving **IN** all circumstances not for the bad ones – but then you knew that. We Christians know with our heads that God is with us whatever we face. Jesus promised, '*I am with you always, even to the end of time,*' but in being thankful, even for the smallest blessings in life, his Spirit witnesses to our spirit and takes us outside ourselves and beyond our difficult circumstances to know that God is in this with us. To distort the lyrics of Paul Simon, God did not give us a bridge over troubled water, but a pathway through it.

Practising praise and gratitude in prayer at the beginning and end of the day points us to God and away from our fears, hurts, and the pain of bad times. It does not remove them, but it does put them in perspective. That's why the simple Ignatian spiritual practice of Examen is a good discipline each night.

But there's more: the Greek word for thanks in this verse is of course *eucharisteo*, which has its root in the word *charis*, meaning grace, which in turn comes from *chara*, meaning joy. We are taken back to that upper room, on the night before his crucifixion, where out of his love for us all Jesus took bread and gave *eucharisteo*, saying '*This is my body, given for you*', and he did that knowing all the pain and torture he would face on the cross to bring that grace and joy of his Spirit into our lives. That is why above all, we should *give thanks in all circumstances*: it is Eucharistic.

One more thing - until recently it hadn't really dawned on me that the English word 'thanksgiving' is in fact two words: thanks and giving. It seems then if we practice thanks, we will be better able to give of ourselves, in whatever way God calls us to do so.

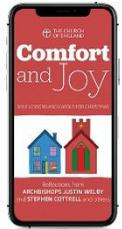
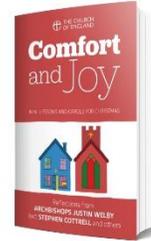
+ Peter

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News and information

Comfort and Joy

Comfort and Joy is this year's Advent and Christmas campaign from the Church of England and builds on the success of the Follow the Star Campaigns in 2018 and 2019 which engaged millions of people open to faith as well as regular church goers. Comfort and Joy has several key elements:



- Fifteen core reflections and youth reflections which will be made available digitally and via a booklet
- A series of national online services with key partners including Christian Aid, the Children's Society, the Church Army, Marie Curie and Embrace the Middle East
- Resources to help churches use Comfort and Joy to engage with their communities. In particular, churches are encouraged to:
 - Add events and services (online and offline) to [A Church Near You](#).
 - Use the free Advent and Christmas Music that will be made available on [A Church Near You](#).
 - Access printed resources through the [Church House Publishing Shop](#).

For more information about Comfort and Joy, [please click here](#).

Transfer, Translate or Transform? The future of Online Church – webinar with Rev Alan Moss, Tuesday 27 October 7pm – 8pm

The first of our new series of online church webinars takes place next Tuesday. Our guest speaker will be the Rev Alan Moss. Alan is a curate in Collier Row and has been working with the Diocesan Communications team over the last 6 months to research and explore the development of online church during the Coronavirus Pandemic and to develop a plan to support parishes in the future. During this webinar Alan will explain what's happened with online church in our diocese and further afield. There will also be an opportunity to discuss experiences and share ideas about the future of online church with other participants. The webinar is open to anyone with an interest in online church (please feel free to forward this information to others in your parish) and is free of charge. Please do register in advance though by [clicking here](#).

Government consultation on the future of planning

The Government is consulting on the future of England's planning system and it is important that voices in local communities are heard. [You can read more about the consultation and have your say here](#). For further information, please contact Carol Richards, Mission in Regeneration Adviser at c.richards475@btinternet.com. The consultation closes at 11.45pm on 29 October.

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Good News – The Living Way

Since Autumn 2019, a small group of young people from the Colchester area and the wider diocese has gathered to develop and practice a rule of life that they have called ‘The Living Way’. The four principles of the rule are ‘living together’, ‘living well’, ‘living with myself’ and ‘living with faith’. Lockdown has given the group an opportunity to meet regularly online to discuss the four principles. One of the members, Joel says “When we meet together, I particularly enjoy being able to share our feelings without being judged.”

The group is supported by Dot Salmon, The Colchester Area Youth Adviser, Bishop Roger and Rev Colin Fairweather of St Paul’s Braintree. Any young people who are interested in joining can find the Living Way on Instagram at @_livingway.

