

Junior Church: Young Peoples' Group
Some Thoughts for the Week Beginning 3rd May 2020

Hello Everyone,

We are entering the seventh week of lockdown and the start of May. Are you suffering from 'lockdown fatigue'? I have a young friend who makes video contact with me every day. This week she declared that she wanted lockdown to be over – she'd had enough. Video links are not same as having people to visit. I know that you had your first virtual Junior Church last week and another one is scheduled for this Sunday. I hope to join you, technology permitting. These types of gatherings do lift the spirits and help us to keep going.

When I was growing up there was a popular song by Simon and Garfunkel called 'Sounds of Silence'. I never understood how silence could be considered a sound, but since the start of lockdown I can see how that might be. One of the benefits of the last few weeks has been the reduction in the noise of motorcars, aircraft and other intrusive sounds, and the corresponding increase in the awareness of the sounds of the natural world: the wind in the trees, more recently the sound of rain, and particularly birdsong.

This Sunday is [International Dawn Chorus Day](#). The [Dawn Chorus](#) is one of those magical experiences of springtime. If you happen to be awake around the time that the sun rises and have your bedroom window open you will hear a 'wall' of bird song that is beautiful, complex and varied.

I once went to see a performance by the internationally famous percussion player [Evelyn Glennie](#). What is remarkable about her, apart from her marvelous playing of a wider range of percussion instruments, is that at the age of 8 she began to lose her hearing and by the age of 12 she was profoundly deaf. How, therefore, is she able to perform? She says that she has learnt to feel music in different part of her body: finger tips, feet and legs. She published a book called 'How to Truly Listen' and she says there is a lot of misunderstanding about deafness. Clearly hearing is a complex and varied thing.

The sounds of lockdown are also complex and varied. There is the noise of the clapping and pot banging in thanks for the care-workers on the front-line of fighting the virus, and the silence that we observed as a nation this week to remember those who, in undertaking their public duties, have died after contracting Covid-19.

It reminded me too that our worship is complex and varied. Sometimes we have Quiet Days when we use the silence to reflect on our faith and 'listen' to God. At other times we make a noise about it (Psalm 150).

One of the most beautiful sounds of all is the human voice and the variety of languages and accents that can be experienced. I was brought up in Northern Ireland

and my accent is a legacy of that upbringing. Even though I have lived in England twice as long as I lived in Ireland, I still have my Irish accent; it is part of me and who I am. I have a friend and colleague who is also from Northern Ireland but her accent is slightly different because she came from the north coast and I am from the east. Another colleague of mine confessed to me recently that he used to make up reasons to meet with her just to listen to the sound of her voice!

Last week I talked about the senses and in particular the sense of touch. This week our Bible passage ([The Gospel of John Chapter 10, 1-10](#)) provides an opportunity to think about sound and hearing. In the passage Jesus conjures up an image that would have been very familiar to those around him. It is the image of the shepherd who cares for his sheep and protects them from the dangers around them, just as Jesus cares for us. It is the sound of the shepherd's voice in particular that is familiar and comforting to the flock and enables them to distinguish, probably from some distance away, that is safe and what is harmful.

In the current climate of uncertainty, isolation and even fear, the voice of someone familiar on the phone or over the garden fence is very comforting. We can understand the power of the human voice. In a complex and varied world full of noise it is important, like the sheep, to be able to be able to recognize the voices of truth and beauty and filter out the ugly and harmful.

When the current emergency is over and we are thrown back into our complex and varied world, will we have been able to use lockdown positively so that, in the words of Evelyn Glennie we can know 'how to truly listen'?

Rodney