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Our two readings today speak to two worlds: the one we all know, the Old World perhaps, one we don't necessarily like, but at least we understand how it works; it holds expectations and hopes, and in a bumbling sort of way, we expect we shall get there; the other is unknown, different, unexpected, a real Rumsfeldian 'unknown, unknown', and many don't even look at it because it is so profoundly 'other' and most importantly is not the 'done thing', it does not compute; its change with a big C.

But of course we are in that largely 'unknown, unknown' now and if any one of us had said on 1st December that within weeks perhaps 1/4 of the worlds 6-7 billion would be confined to their homes and that traffic in the UK would be down to levels last seen in 1955; or that for the first time in a long time the air over most world cities would actually be breathable, one can imagine how one would have been written-off as a bit touched. 10

Perhaps our Gospel reading speaks to that Old World Order: surely the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday was at least in part about welcoming the new revolutionary to the old capitol city where in a few days time surely, he would overthrow the current occupiers, save the people from the oppression of the Romans, and usher-in a new period of national self-determination. This was the way it had been for over a millennia for the people of Israel: a period of oppression followed by the emergence of an heroic leader who led them into a new era of better things; think Moses, or Gideon, or David or Josiah or Judas Maccabeus. Perhaps they were thinking: "We are just waiting for Jesus to conform to type and be the next such leader". "We had hoped" - says another 20

as recorded in Luke's Gospel - "that he would have been the one to redeem Israel".

Yet it was not to be. Jesus did not conform and his response was as noted in our Philippians reading. The result was not yet-another-cycle, was not 'the way it had always been', but something very much an 'unknown, unknown'. And to a large degree and even though it happened two thousand years ago, we are still very much living in the outworking of that unknowable eternal love of God because of Christ's death and resurrection. We are the people who can live and deal with that 'unknown, unknown' because our eyes are not fixed upon the physical certainties of 'the way its always been', but on a trust in 'the One who loved us to the end', on the one who even way back in Jeremiah said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love". 30

So let's just park those thoughts for a moment and turn to our present situation.

Our new slogan in the UK may not be very poetic but it seems to be effective: Stay at Home//Protect the NHS//Save Lives. Sometimes its helpful to piggy-back our thoughts onto well-known slogans, to re-purpose them, whilst keeping the original in-mind: we are creatures of memory and we are most effective when we can bring-to-mind truths to keep us on-track; after-all many of our scriptures where written with this purpose in mind. 40

So the next time you read or hear the slogan and call to mind our readings of today perhaps this would help as we prepare for what comes next:

Stay at Home

when Paul wrote about the full armour of God, he wanted to equip his people with everything they needed to leave home in the morning and face their daily world and he spoke to them about keeping the Gospel truths in mind, about a certain firmness of mind that rejects negativity and doubts, (God's eternal love for us is always there), about a daily sense of being there for others in a peaceful attitude to all and about being in-prayer moment-by-moment, entreating God for the welfare of those we are amongst. This is Staying at Home, in that we are not being swayed by what's outside but are at Home in the Spirit, we know what's true and that continues; 50

Protect the NHS

And in our case this is about the Church; our institution if it is that, is about guarding our wellbeing together in the Church; many are speaking to others across our Group even if it is just by phone; we are continuing to honour and have regard and respect for each other; much of the way we work continues day-by-day even if in a different way: our services, our governance, the office, our Group News - even music, although at the moment that's just listening to me singing and playing the guitar not very well; 60

Save Lives

let's not ever forget that it is our witness of our love together which is designed to let people know that Christ is there for them; yet let's not also forget that our love for others is grounded in Christ's love for us; we love because as Paul mentions, He loved us first. So Christ saves each of us, and that enables us to be Christ to others.

Well I hope that was not a stretch too far, but if it was then perhaps we could simply remember using the inspiration of our readings today, that the way everybody thought God was going to do His rescue plan, never happened but the way that it did happen, was to do with the humility of the King of Kings, who threw-off everything to do with status and power and instead 'became as a servant'. 70

And of course that is usually where the analysis of that Philippians reading ends. If we are not careful, leaving things there can lead to a certain 'welfare fatigue'. We should keep going in the reading, and move through the all-important 'therefore': 'therefore God highly exalted Him'. We are always too eager to keep-on-going-along and not realise the 'therefore'; and the 'therefore' 80 speaks to a fantastic hope, a hope in our future.

And our future really is glorious. It is grounded in reminding ourselves now of Christ's eternal love for us, in our love and regard for each other and in our devotion to prayerfully deepening our relationship with the One who died for me and give Himself up for me.