

Thursday March 4

**1 John 1:1-10 – undecieving ourselves**

- 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.
- 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.
- 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.
- 4 We write this to make our joy complete.
- 5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.
- 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.
- 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
- 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
- 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

A face stares out at you out from the television screen. It's a man wearing a hospital gown and an oxygen mask; he's clearly scared. Then another face, a woman dressed in surgical scrubs and with another mask; she looks exhausted. Then another scared hospital patient and another exhausted hospital worker. All staring at you, all of them saying nothing. Then a printed message on the screen: 'Look them in the eye and tell them you are doing all you can to prevent the spread of Coronavirus'.

Some of the statistics have been shocking: figures for infections, hospitalisations, people so ill they need days or even weeks on ventilators. Then the deaths, each one leaving behind bereaved loved ones who couldn't be at their bedsides at the point of death, their places taken by yet another exhausted nurse or doctor. We blamed the figures on the virus. It passes so easily from one person to another, and especially this new mutation that started in Kent back in December. Remember that printed message on the screen: 'Look them in the eye and tell them you are doing all you can to prevent the spread of Coronavirus'. How much should we blame on the virus, and how much on *ourselves*?

It's been so easy to be careless with social distancing, with wearing masks, with washing your hands. The restrictions were relaxed a bit over Christmas, we faced the temptation to bend the rules as far as we thought we could get away with, and look what happened. Infection rates went through the roof. I can blame it all on other people of course, but those people in hospital were asking me: '.... Tell them *you* are doing all you can ...'.

Then I hear words about PENITENCE from John's first letter in the New Testament: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us". We're not talking about breaking some religious rule designed to stop you having a good time. The great commandment 'love your neighbour as yourself' that Jesus draws our attention to is far simpler than that, but as we've found out in the past twelve months, very challenging. What we've seen in our hospitals is a stark reminder of what happens when we don't take it seriously enough.

And that's why what Saint John said needs saying again:

'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. '

Or as the ancient Christian writer, Augustine of Hippo put it: 'Before God can deliver us we must undeceive ourselves'. And I'm not inclined to argue with him.