

Thought for the day, Thursday 9th July

We are not alone in this.

I have no doubt you are pretty much done talking about COVID-19, but the reality is that its impact will last for a long time. People self-isolating, struggling to buy essentials, not taking Communion or being able to gather in person for fellowship, we have found it such a challenge to adapt to life like this.

But for many Christians around the world, insecurity and anxiety is their normal. Last week I read an article published by the open doors UK Charity. This organisation works hard to bring Hope and resources to persecuted Christians all over the world. These Christians follow Jesus no matter what the cost. Meeting together as a Church for these brothers and sisters could cost them their freedom, if not their life. While we have hope at the moment that Churches will soon reopen fully for worship and we'll be able to meet together again an estimated 260 million Christians around the world do not get the religious freedom that we do.

I want to share a story with you, about a young girl called Kim Sang Hwa, who was born in North Korea, the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. She didn't find out that her parents were Christians until she accidentally found their secret Bible hidden in a closet when she was 12 years old. She was faced with an incredibly difficult decision. Should she do her patriotic duty and tell the police about the illegal Bible or should she find out more about Christianity from her parents and risk her own life?

Children in North Korea are taught that they should report any suspicious activity to the authorities or to their teachers, even if its about their parents. If reported, Christians are often sent to labour camps indefinitely, it is estimated that there up to 70,000 Christians imprisoned in North Korea. Kim made the brave decision to speak to her Father about what she found. He told her about the life he had found in Jesus and started explaining some of the Bible stories to her. Over the following weeks, she experienced the Holy Spirit and made the decision to follow Jesus, knowing that it might cost her everything, even her life.

During this time of lockdown for us all it's not that we just miss meeting together for worship, pray and to support one another, we actually need it and we are having to find new ways to stay connected. The persecuted Church already know what we are relearning, that togetherness is vital. Togetherness

is at the heart of being Church and maybe in our isolation God has been showing us just how much we need to come together. It can be a challenge to keep regular contact with other Christians but let us not forget we are all part of an incredible global family. God is still at work. He can and will still use us to be a blessing to those for whom faith is a daily risk.

Psalm 46 vs 1 says, "God is our protection and source of strength.

He is always ready to help us in times of trouble." Remember today and all the days going forward that we have God and we have each other.

Let us pray

Lord, please continue to strengthen our persecuted family for whom isolation is nothing new and isn't likely to end. As they suffer for following Jesus, please show them Your love, intimacy and protection. As we pray for them and learn from them, may You unite us as one global body of Christ. Amen

Prayer by Emma Worrall from Open doors UK.