

Song: Outrageous Grace written by Godfrey Birtill (CMP1114)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z3q8IIT-XA>

There's a lot of pain but a lot more healing
There's a lot of trouble but a lot more peace
There's a lot of hate but a lot more loving
There's a lot of sin but a lot more grace

*Oh outrageous grace oh outrageous grace
Love unfurled by heaven's hand
Oh outrageous grace oh outrageous grace
Through my Jesus I can stand*

There's a lot of fear but a lot more freedom
There's a lot of darkness but a lot more light
There's a lot of cloud but a lot more vision
There's a lot of perishing but a lot more life

There's an enemy
That seeks to kill what it can't control
It twists and turns
Making mountains out of molehills
But I will call on my Lord
Who is worthy of praise
I run to Him and I am saved

Over the past few weeks, particularly since the lockdown started, I am sure that you have all, like me, experienced a multitude of emotions. I am certainly finding that my feelings seem to be much nearer the 'surface' and my mood can change quite quickly (and no, I don't think it is just my age!).

One minute I am feeling anxious and worried about the whole situation around the world, and in particular my own loved ones; another minute I feel happy and grateful that I am having more time to slow down, relax and enjoy things like the garden, knitting, doing jigsaws, playing the piano.

It is so easy to hear or read the news stories that focus on the negative – what is not happening fast enough; how people are not following the guidance; how difficult it is to get some essential items; people trying to cope with loss of jobs, lack of money or loneliness.

However, there have been an overwhelming number of stories of hope and love that have shone like a ray of sunshine through the dark clouds:

- The postman from South Tyneside who has been dressing up to carry out his deliveries, putting a smile on many people's faces.
- 99-year-old Captain Tom raising so many millions of pounds for the NHS and capturing the hearts of the nation.
- Pollution levels dropping across the world – the Himalayas are visible in Northern India for the first time in 30 years!
- Endless commitment from all healthcare workers and other key workers who work tirelessly to look after those who are sick, or help to keep essential resources available.

These are just some of the stories that have hit the national headlines. There are many other moments in every family, community, town or city where individuals are making a difference to

other people's lives (whilst keeping within social distancing guidelines where appropriate). As a teacher, I am in the strange world of 'virtual schooling' and as part of the suggested work we shared with our children was to think of ways to make contact with those who were special to them but who they might not be able to see. A couple of weeks later, I received this message from one child:

'I wrote a letter to my great nana a few days ago, she is nearly 90 and lives on her own in Plymouth. We speak to her every week but I thought a letter would be nice. She called today to say that it had arrived and she loved reading it and I wrote her a poem too which she said she would treasure forever.'

I am sure this made that great-nana's day and brought a smile (and perhaps a tear) to her eye.

Rainbows have been shared across the world – here is one that children at my school painted and displayed in our noticeboard:



Whenever I see one, I am reminded of the story of Noah and God's promise: 'I have placed my rainbow in the clouds as a sign of my promise until the end of time, to you and to all the earth.' (Genesis 9 v13 – Living Bible Edition).

The rainbow is seen as a symbol of hope and love – a sign that God is with each and every one of us.

This was reinforced to me a few days ago when I was moving some furniture at my mum's house – I took a drawer out to make it easier and a small piece of paper caught my eye which had written at the top in my dad's writing: 'Mother's diary 1987' (some of you may still remember my nan, Doris Lewis). I know you are not meant to read other people's diaries but I felt so drawn to it that I had to pick it up and read it. I share it with you now:

'Radiate the happiness you really want in life. Try and bring happy smiles to others, get the confidence that God is still in charge of this wonderful world and realise that within you a power lies awaiting your command which is super atomic in its power. Believe this, every hour of the day and watch the marvellous change that takes place in your life.'

I truly feel that this was one of those God-given moments – I was meant to find that piece of paper at that particular time and I feel truly blessed that I can share her words with you.

Let us pray using the words of Romans 15 verse 13:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

God bless you all x