

Dear Friends

The young adults in my household have been remarkably patient people during this time of self-isolation and social distancing. They and their friends have also been very creative as I have heard of Zoom game night parties, social distance bonfires, and lots and lots of walks. It isn't easy being cut off from friends and activities at any age and I know my young adult children and their friends are eager to see restrictions eased and thereby their social options increased. But I have no worries that they will do so cautiously and with respect for public health.

No matter how young people have approached the challenge of the last two months, it may be said that they have had three things going for them. The first is that they are not as vulnerable to Covid-19 as their elders and that can ease some anxiety. The second is that they are what some writers have termed 'digital natives', a generation who have grown up with technology and therefore have an inherent comfort with it. As a 'digital immigrant' I always worry that adding a new app to my phone is going to cause it to blow up. Finally, many have had the comfort of living with others, at home or otherwise.

This is not the case for everyone. Recently I have become more aware of the challenge being faced by people who have not the advantages listed above. People in a vulnerable demographic, a little sceptical about technology's capacity to create community, and most importantly, living alone. When experts speak of the emotional and mental challenge of this pandemic, I believe this is who they are talking about.

Recently many commentators have quoted Aristotle's observation that *the human being is a social animal* (leave it to a pandemic to re-ignite interest in Aristotle!). But no offence to Greek philosophers, it was hardly an original thought. A thousand years earlier Israel identified that we are made to be in relationship. Genesis 2:18a says "*It is not good for the human one to be alone.*" That doesn't mean we need to be surrounded at all times but it does mean that there is more than just utility to having neighbours, running errands, chatting over a fence, or going to worship. These interactive elements of life contribute to our health and well-being.

Christian spirituality teaches that there is merit in solitude, that being alone with our God is necessary to discern the still, small voice in which the Holy directs the path of our living. But solitude is not meant to be forced upon us nor be indefinite in length. Moses climbs the mountain alone to meet God in a burning bush but is then commissioned to return to Egypt to free God's people. Jesus enters the wilderness alone but returns to preach the good news. The disciples are alone in an upper room, but then empowered to go to all the earth.

Solitude prepares us for life in community. Isolation is neither our intention nor our destiny. Please join me in holding in prayer those of our community for whom this time of cautious isolation is a long and difficult night.

Grace and peace,
Michael

P.S. Winnipeg based Christian musician Steve Bell has made some of his catalogue available free of charge during the pandemic. His song, High Above the Fray, is a beautiful rendition of Psalm 113 and a reminder that God's love remains steadfast in all manner of crises.

You can enjoy it by clicking here: "[High Above the Fray](#)" by Steve Bell