

CABIN FEVER

We're used going out and about freely but suddenly, thanks to Coronavirus, many of us find ourselves cooped up at home. It's fine for a while, but then we may begin to experience a collection of unfamiliar feelings. We are bored, irritable and can't think of anything to do, life becomes monotonous, pointless and boring. This psychological state has been classed as 'cabin fever'. It's something Alaskans are familiar with – they know it all too well from having to stay indoors for month after month during their long snowy winters.

What do we do with all this unwanted time? How can we ward off 'cabin fever'? Once we've followed social media suggestions and thrown out all unwanted stuff, cleared the attic, painted the spare room, attacked the garden, done the accounts, tidied the house, polished the floor so you can see your face in it (or use it as a skating rink), we may find we have time on our hands – time when we could discover the value and treasure of spending time with God. It can be the most amazing experience of our lives and might be treasure that we discover for the first time ever. Most of us aren't used to doing this and we're unsure how to go about it. People have been finding out about this down the ages.

Have you ever heard the Vicar or one of the church leaders say that they're, 'Going on Retreat'? They disappear for a week or so, and you wonder what they've been up to? It obviously isn't a holiday, it does seem to have something to do with prayer ... so what is this all about?

Men and women have been 'retreating' for centuries. It's nothing to do with 'sounding the retreat' and running away defeated. It's more like the positive step of 'going on holiday with God.' Most of us can't do this in our ordinary lives because we go on holiday with family and friends, and are at work the rest of the time. Now our 'Coronavirus-world' means that many of us are self-isolating and confined to home. We suddenly find we have enforced time by ourselves with only those we live with to talk to, or none else if we live alone.

How might we use some of this time to positively find and be with God? For starters, we could use the special prayer book that our Vicar, James, has prepared for us. The suggestion is that we might follow the pattern used in monasteries down the ages, and set aside definite times of day for prayer. James has prepared user-friendly material for the morning and the evening. To get us going, there is a liturgy we can follow on our own or with someone else. There are Bible readings for every day (you can download the whole Bible onto your computer or smart-phone from the internet if you don't have a Bible at home), and there are suggestions for prayer for church members and leaders, for our locality of Bromley and for the whole world. It is available to you on the church website and on the church Facebook page. If you don't have access to the internet, let us know and we will try to get a copy posted to you or dropped through your front door.

Our enforced and unwanted time of isolation could become a special time, in which we discover the presence of God in our own homes.

We might decide to try to do this but children, caring for someone else, just keeping our daily lives going takes all our time and energy. If this happens, then the following story told by Anthony DeMello might be reassuring.

A cobbler came to Rabbi Isaac of Ger and said, "Tell me what to do about my morning prayer. My customers are poor men who only have one pair of shoes. I pick up their shoes late in the evening and work on them most of the night; at dawn there is still work to be done if the men are to have shoes ready before they go to work. Now my question is: 'What should I do about my morning prayer?'"

'What have you been doing till now?' the rabbi asked.

'Sometimes I rush through the prayer quickly and get back to my work – but then I feel bad^(OBJ) about it. At other times I let the power of prayer go by. Then too I feel a sense of loss and every now and then, as I raise my hammer from the shoes, I can almost hear my heart sigh, 'What an unlucky man I am, that I am not able to make my morning prayer.'

Said the Rabbi, 'If I were God, I would value that sigh more than the prayer' (From 'Taking flight' by Anthony DeMello)

Some of us may feel very distressed and frightened about what is happening. Let's remember the familiar story, 'Footsteps'. It's told by Margaret Fishback Powers in 'A deep but dazzling darkness'.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamt he was walking along the beach with his Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.

For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him, the other to the Lord. When the last scene in his life flashed before him he looked back at the footprints on the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him, and he questioned the Lord about it, 'Lord you said that, once I decided to follow you, you would walk with me all the way. But I've noticed that during the most difficult times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, in times when I needed you most, you would leave me.'

The Lord replied, 'My precious child, I love you and would never leave you during your trials and suffering this; when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.'

God promises, 'Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.' (Deuteronomy 31.6)

Jesus promised us, as he left this earth, 'Lo I am with you even to the end of the age...' (Matthew 28.20)

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