

## Isolation Radio Talk

### Coping with Trauma

Hello, my name is Simon Lewis and I am the Priest of the Benefice of St Andrew's Blagdon with St Hugh's, Charterhouse, St Michael's Compton Martin and St Bartholomew's, Ubley. I think the Ring O'Bells Radio, 'Isolation Station' is a fantastic concept to help support our neighbourhood at this traumatic time: and I will come back to that theme in a moment.

In our weekly newsletter 'Church Link', distributed by email to those who subscribe (and a little plug, anyone can subscribe) - we will be encouraging everyone to tune-in, to stay connected, to be actively involved where and when they can with 'Isolation Station'. There are also a number of links to important online information about how all of us can look after our minds and bodies while we are isolating.

I am a great fan of radio - from having a small transistor radio tucked under the bedclothes late into the night listening to LBC and Capital Radio (hopping my parents would not hear) to having Jazz FM, Classic FM, Radio 2 and my beloved Radio 4 and the World Service constantly in the background. Please do encourage your family, friends and neighbours to listen.

I have been asked to share a thought with you this Sunday. My theme is: Coping with Trauma.

What follows is a mixture from others and me; we share hoping to bring comfort. Watching the scenes from around the world - Italy, Spain, India and our country - of humanity standing on balconies or in gardens or streaming; I wonder how we really are reacting to this coronavirus crisis?

This crisis is traumatic for neighbourhoods, the nation and the world. It is not a *shock-event* like a fire or a terrorist attack: it is a slow-building crisis – shattering our assumptions that the world is generally safe and reliable; that all that we've worked for in businesses, churches and communities will be fruitful. The loss of security and hope, the breaking down of supportive connections between people, the family isolation, the individual isolation, and the fear that this crisis is overwhelming – *all* of these are characteristics of trauma. Some of the wisdom that has been gained about trauma can help. Here are four pieces of that wisdom:

1. First, our whole selves are affected – you may feel all sorts of strange symptoms, because your body is reacting to the fact that you *don't feel safe*. Concentration and sleep may be difficult. You feel distracted; find it hard to cope. Emotions will be all over the place in surprising ways. Knowing that it's normal to be up, down, energetic, exhausted, afraid will help you to cope with it.
2. Second, people react very differently, depending on different backgrounds and experiences, including past traumas. You need to be kind and understanding to others; also to yourself.
3. Our third piece of wisdom is that you respond best when you have clear, reliable information; when you have something practical that you can do; and when you are connected to others, if not in person then by phone or through social media, TV and radio.

4. The final piece of wisdom is for you to *make sense of things* by making them part of your story – the story of your own life, the stories of your neighbourhood, and the story of our world - the only home we have. But this takes time. While the trauma is unfolding and you continue to experience the pain of losing what you once had, it's very hard to make sense of it. You need to remember that holding on together is how you will eventually come through and look back on what you have experienced.

Neighbourhoods (and individuals) typically respond to disaster by first going through a 'heroic phase', full of energy and self-sacrifice. This eventually burns itself out, and is followed by a 'disillusionment phase', which may contain much mutual blame and suspicion. Only as the disillusionment phase loses its force can realistic, hopeful rebuilding take place.

This is a very confusing and draining time, a time when ordinary healthy rhythms are lost. You may feel in your mind and body the impact of trauma – feeling low and anxious one day when it's hard to get your brain in gear, energetic the next day, and all at a time when we need to be able to change and adapt to unusual events. So, taking care of yourself and your own well-being is vital. That includes the basics of good rest, eating, and exercise. It also includes, as far as possible, having people you trust, whom you can share with, and be in touch with.

I am going to end with a prayer for those who pray or a reflection for those who want to ponder the sentiment of the prayer.

Lord Jesus,  
you taught us to love our neighbour,  
and to care for those in need  
as if we were caring for you.  
In this time of trauma and anxiety,  
give us strength to comfort the fearful,  
to tend the sick,  
and to assure the isolated  
of our love, and your love,  
for your name's sake.

**Amen.**

Thank you for listening.