

From inside the tent

Psalm 91:10 : Neither shall any plague come into your tent

Dear Friends,

Camping in the Swiss alps years ago, we used a high quality British made tent shaped like a dome, it hugged the ground looking like a green and white nylon igloo and you could not stand up in it. It was snug and protected us against the *föhn*, so well, that at the foot of the Matterhorn we were unaware of the overnight snow until unzipping the flaps in the early morning to peer out at enveloping whiteness. It folded into the size of a thimble and could be taken anywhere so its walls could keep us safe at all times and all places.

We are fond of saying that we live in a global village, that the world is our oyster, that we could as well be in New York or Singapore that the world is shrinking as never before. The first UK case of Covid19 illustrated that well. What is more natural for a man of business than to return from a conference in Singapore to ski in France and then come home to England? This lifestyle is not of course available to all but the benefits or dangers of international trade are. You know this is not new - the Silk road brought spices, silks, precious gems and ideas to the Mediterranean in a rich exchange but also unknown sicknesses to both continents.

So from inside my tent today, locked down, anxious for friends and family, desperately sheltering from another interview on the wireless asking questions for which the answer has to be "we do not know" what have I discovered?

Firstly I have discovered generosity from those around us - even if we are shut in, friends are looking out for one another, neighbours are helping and sharing, shopping for each other and speaking together on the telephone, over the garden fence, across balconies and in many other ways more than before. Secondly there is a wide wide tent that encompasses all the world - I listen to radio from France and New York where I used to live and it is fascinating to hear the same steps being taken, the same questions being asked in interview, the same reply: "On ne connait pas" There are descriptions of places I know and have visited which are now as empty as Burnham Market. Our tent, *my* tent is not so small or as insular as I thought. Thirdly the rediscovered pleasure of stopping, of not always doing, not measuring by enumerating in the diary a list of achievements but rather writing a compendium of thinking.

I wonder how much of this shall we keep when we are allowed out of our tent?

It will take considerable time for the global or even the national community to start up again. Let us pray that we may begin this renewal thoughtfully, with proper precaution but also that we may grasp the good things we have found: More peacefulness in some cases, an appreciation of what matters, affection, regard, admiration for the caring professions, and a realisation that we are not joined by the complex web of trade agreements, tourism, or economics, but by a shared humanity or really a shared humanness which makes us a race together not races apart and penetrates into the safety of our imagined tiny canvas.

With best wishes
Steve