



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

Archbishop Stephen wrote in the Easter edition of the [Big Issue](#). The article follows in full

Some years ago I was due to lead an assembly at a Church of England comprehensive school that I visited regularly. This was a tough gig, around 800 adolescents crowded into a hall on a Monday morning. Standing to give the talk, you are greeted by a sea of faces grimacing back, “Go on, impress me”. On this occasion I hadn’t prepared much to say and was feeling a little anxious. It was Lent, the six weeks leading up to Easter, so I had a vague idea of persuading them to ‘take something on’ rather than ‘give something up’, and in a moment of prayer and panic an idea came to me. So I stood before them and found myself saying something like this –

‘We live in a frenzied and busy world. Even in the few hours you have been up this morning, you’ll have listened to the radio, watched TV, tik-toked, twittered, texted and instagrammed your friends. Noise, chatter and busyness have accompanied your every move. And what you won’t have had is any stillness nor silence.

I have this crazy idea that many of the world’s problems are caused by our inability to sit still, to be quiet and reflect. So, in this season of Lent, we should try to give up being frantic and take on moments of stillness. And this could change your life. And change the world.’

Then I placed a chair in the middle of the school hall. I sat down. I closed my eyes. I rested my hands upon my knees and remained there in restful silence for two minutes. Amazingly, the whole school was silent as well.

When I finished, and before I had a chance to say anything more, the assembly erupted into spontaneous applause (which had never happened before at an assembly I had taken!). I then suggested they might like to try it for themselves: be still and dwell in the giftedness of the present moment. And see what difference it makes.

For some of the most significant things I have learnt or encountered in life have come from the well of silence and waiting upon God, allowing myself to stop for a change. And I am troubled for myself and for our world when every waking hour is filled with activity that sweeps our dreams away and has no room for rest and play.

So rather than always 'wishing our lives away', fretting about the future or raking over the past, hoping for a new car, a better house, a fancy holiday or a new suit, I invite you, as I invited those children at that assembly, to see and receive each moment of life as a gift. As a Christian, I see this as a gift from God. The Catholic writer Jean-Pierre de Caussade, a French Jesuit priest, said that 'the present moment holds infinite riches beyond your wildest dreams'.

And while I know we live in a world where too many people have too much time and waiting forced upon them because of unemployment,

homelessness and others inequalities, I also know that many of us are too busy, and often those who have the least are the most busy, simply, trying to make ends meet. Nevertheless, it remains true that the only thing in life we possess with any certainty is this moment now. Therefore, the challenge of life, whoever we are, is to dwell in this moment joyfully and passionately and build a better future by caring for ourselves and for one another in the here and now.

There are lots of occasions in the Bible where we find Jesus waiting and being still and giving time to prayer and reflection. All his actions flow from this quiet waiting upon God and the intimacy of prayer.

Easter is almost upon us. On the night before he dies, Jesus waits and prays. On that first Good Friday, he hangs in silence. Around the cross, everyone was waiting. Some in silent vigil. Some hurling abuse. Others just enjoying the gruesome spectacle of an execution. All waiting for Jesus to die. Praying it would be over.

And after he died, they laid his body in the tomb and waited some more. Probably in silence a lot of the time. With his death, their hopes and dreams had died as well.

On Easter Day God raises Jesus to life. Those same disheartened and disillusioned people were amazed. Astounded. Turned around. But there was more waiting. More being still. Jesus told them to pray and to wait for the Holy Spirit.

When that Spirit came they were turned around again. Charged with the life and purpose of God, they spread the message of Jesus across all the world. Their lives were transformed beyond their wildest dreams.

This Spirit can be ours too. That is the message of Easter: out of death comes life. In waiting comes presence. Out of silence comes purpose.

So, be still. Take a deep breath. Take hold of life.

Happy Easter!

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