

Carpe Diem

My email has been flooded with pictures, stories, Government warnings and notices of event and venue closures. One particular email sent to me from a family member had a commentary titled “The Uncanny Melancholy of Empty Photographs in the Time of Coronavirus.” The commentary contained several images of empty spaces – supermarket shelves, beaches, church buildings, subways, highways, public squares and playgrounds – exploring the fascination people appear to have with humanity’s absence from the world.

On the one hand, the commentary talked about the pictorial representation of the absence of people providing us with a feeling of being a lone traveller in the landscape, a ‘heroic adventurer’. On the other hand, it talked about the photographs of empty public spaces capturing an alternative reality emptied of our presence, bringing an ‘uncanniness’ described as “sinister, disturbing, suspect, strange...characterised better by ‘dread’ than terror...” It went on to say that these pictorial representations produce “an assortment of emotional responses: estrangement, social alienation, melancholy...” and that when these pictures are viewed in the context of our current global health crisis, we are “bearing witness to our own erasure” as ‘social distancing’ isolates us physically from each other and significantly disrupts and stops our lifestyles.



Empty shelves at a supermarket in Los Angeles. A lone clergyman in Cologne Cathedral, Germany.



The London underground on March 16 2020



An empty playground in Nafplio, Peloponnese

Reading this commentary gave me such a sense of helplessness and hopelessness until I was reminded of some of the other images I have seen recently on social media and television – Carpe Diem- people seizing the day! Italians, under coronavirus lockdown, keeping their spirits up and boosting their morale with singing and cooking; house-bound Italians and Spanish standing on their balconies to applaud and express their appreciation to doctors amid coronavirus lockdown; Spanish police in Majorca playing songs in the streets to entertain isolated people during lockdown, and on a YouTube clip, two Spanish neighbours playing tennis out their windows, hitting the ball to each other until eventually one of them misses and the ball falls to the street below.



Quarantined nation turns to songs, 'balcony parties' and elaborate meals to boost morale



Spanish Police entertain people in the street.



Hoodsite Mar 16, 2020

I was also reminded of stories about individuals who have decided to launch initiatives to help those who are significantly disadvantaged during this time – Kindness Factory, Cart Buddy and Adopt a Health Care Worker. Close to home there have been emails going back and forth between members of our congregation and the Pastoral Care team offering to shop and/or cook for, drop off information to and visit some of our house-bound church family or others whose home situations make it extremely difficult to get out and do the basic errands during this time. People are not merely looking out for their own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Their attitudes reflect those also in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:4-5)



Carpe Diem- seize the day! During this time, let's not isolate ourselves emotionally and spiritually from each other - the body of Christ here at St John's. Let's stay connected through messages, phone calls, and social media so we can 'meet together', reach out, care for and encourage each other, strengthening our bond with each other and spurring each other on to love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24-25). Most importantly, stay connected through prayer so that we can connect spiritually and stay firmly anchored in Christ.

Carpe Diem- seize the day! We have an awesome opportunity to be the salt and light of the world to our community around us (Matthew 5:13-16). Imagine how we could 'repaint' the picture of estrangement, social alienation and melancholy if we stepped up taking the lead on giving (time, resources, talents and money), compassion, and community care during this season of isolation. What an impact we could make and what a light we could be, pointing a way to connection, security, hope and salvation found through Jesus.

References:

1. **“10 Ways Christians Can Exemplify Faith and Peace during COVID-19”**; Crosswalk.com.website, March 2020; accessed 20/03/20; <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/10-ways-christians-can-exemplify-faith-and-peace-during-covid-19.html>
2. **“Friday essay: the uncanny melancholy of empty photographs in the time of coronavirus”**; theconversation.com website, March 20, 2020; accessed 22/03/20; theconversation.com/friday-essay-the-uncanny-melancholy-of-empty-photographs-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-133615