

I was asked to share what the last 10 days has meant for me as one who has had to 'self-distance'.

Like so many, Monday last week was a turning point. In the afternoon I was welcoming people into church for a memorial with a friendly 'welcome and would you like some hand-spray'. Then very soon after we were told we couldn't go to our pub or hold church services. Then the realisation dawned on me that I was 'at risk'. As one with mild, well managed asthma I hadn't really seen myself as such, but it seemed like it was time to take the threat seriously and to do as I was told. As someone who is generally a practical helper, a jump in and try it person, to overnight becoming someone who shouldn't really be doing anything that brought me into contact with people that felt hard – how was I to be who I am when I can't do those things? And how am I going to cope with a husband who has to run around after his mother and me (I'm not too demanding).

From that moment on I think the overriding feeling is that of being 'busy'. There seems to have been so much to do and then having done it to change it because it is already out of date. There was a busyness, and I'm certainly not saying this is wrong, about how to keep connected to our congregation, how can we be church without meeting together, how can we lessen the pain of being unable to meet on Mothering Sunday of all days? And then how do we do the right thing whilst managing risk, criticism, practicalities? And just who is church? There's the email list, the Lay Pastoral List, the Electoral Role, the hangers on – what if someone is forgotten and what if our well-meant 'operation flower bomb' actually took out the entire congregation? We had with great hope set up a new Hub group recently, we'd managed to meet once before restrictions made it impossible. We have vowed to continue by WhatsApp for now but there just hasn't been the time or headspace to do more than set up the group. And yet I look back on the day and wonder what made it so busy.

And of course immense sadness too. I've cried more in the last 10 days than I have since my mother died. I couldn't write the Facebook post saying our Baby group was no longer running without crying. I felt so sad that I couldn't go and sit in the church to find some quiet.

I'm not normally described as a worrier but that seems to have come from nowhere in the last 10 days too – rational and irrational. The media and Facebook frenzy of what was happening and where and how would my loved ones be affected invades my mind? And just how do you deal with an 88 year old father who interprets the rules his own way and wants to carry on volunteering at the hospital shop and shopping daily?

Last week my worry was about getting my daughter home from London before it went into Lockdown. How silly that seems now that I have a son in actual lockdown in a foreign country with no prospect of a flight home any time soon (*post writing update – Praise the Lord he is home!*). And then you feel bad because rationally I know they are safe and my worries are nothing compared with so many others.

That brings a sense of guilt – of making it about me and mine when it is so much bigger than that, but also knowing that without looking after mine I can't properly think about others.

My youngest daughter turned 21 last week, her celebrations consisted of a beer and a balloon with her housemates. Today my older daughter graduates as a doctor. 6 years of study came to a very abrupt end with none of the usual celebrations, goodbyes, foreign electives or even the normal number of exams. There is a sense of complete flatness about the whole thing, no excitement or anticipation of finally being a doctor. It feels like we are in mourning for the key moments of life, for how they should have been, coupled with knowing so many are mourning the loss of loved ones.

Next week Dr Em will be heading in to work in a London hospital – no nice induction, no polishing the shoes and laying out the new uniform the night before – just straight into a baptism of fire.

I know all around me people have similar stories, similar worries, and in amongst that I want to show that my faith makes a difference. And it does; but I have also found there has been so much to do or that felt like needed doing that time and head space for God has been hard to find. I thank God for my dog....for the excuse and now permission to walk with him and have some moments of calm surrounded by stunning coastal scenery.....and to breathe and to try to listen to His voice drowned out by so much other noise.