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Dear Friends,

A brave new world ...or ... Jesus' parting gifts
Acts 2. 1-21....and suddenly from heaven there came..

Whilst we are living in our own separate bubbles here in Wales, over the bridge in England shops are opening or preparing to reopen mid-June in order to help the economy "bounce back". I'm just trying to imagine what this brave new world will look like. Shoppers unable to touch items as they browse, items covered in plastic to prevent infection, shoes in quarantine because someone has tried them on, and staff protected behind plastic screens.



I wonder whether you are desperate for a dose of retail therapy or whether you, like me, have discovered that there are a lot of things you might want but just don't need? Some changes will be temporary but others could be required for years. It's as if we will emerge from our lockdown to live in another world whose message will be "don't touch". Yet we are sensory beings. I need to touch and be touched. Again, this week when I called some of you, I understood the heartache you feel because you can only see your family at a distance. No wonder illicit barbecues, walks, football games and socials have been happening around our community. Yes we are desperate to be with others and we are delighted that from Monday, here in Wales, we can meet our families outdoors.

The story of the gift of God's Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the gift of connection not with things but with people. The disciples had waited in Jerusalem for the promised Advocate or Spirit and, as they waited, it was as though a whirlwind from heaven rushed amongst them, setting them alight with the ability to communicate to complete strangers from other lands who spoke other languages. Perhaps it was the language of connection and love that swept through them...

As I reflect on this story and the life of Jesus, I think of a man who was totally non judgmental; he touched the untouchables with love and kissed the guilty clean. Jesus seemed not to see as we see or act as we act, or judge as we judge. The seemingly unforgivable were forgiven, the worthless were given back their worth and the unnoticed were noticed. If his Holy Spirit were to sweep through us now, just imagine whose lives we would touch.

Today I received heart-breaking news. Emmah Muhwati died of an asthma attack in Zimbabwe last night. Many years ago the owner of a care agency asked if my mother, who suffered with Alzheimer's, would warm to having a black carer. I was shocked that she needed to ask the question. Even in the 1960s few of the staff in my parents' clothing factory in London were white. Father knew, as a young Jewish man, what it feels like to be hated and my parents made it their business to welcome people from all ethnic minorities into their work place. From the moment Emmah walked into my mother's home she loved her and cared for her as if she were her own mother. She washed my mother, fed my mother, changed my mother, laughed and played with my mother with a love that goes beyond my understanding. When my mother thought she was a toddler she washed her teddy bears, when my mother imagined she was going on a blind date she painted her finger nails, when my mother needed her nappy changed like a baby she shook the talcum powder and freshened her up like an infant. How I loved her.

Often I drove hours on my day off from Royal Wootton Bassett to see them in Surrey and, when I felt resentful because my sister living nearby, rarely looked in. Emmah reminded me to love my sister for who she is, not who I want her to be. When I watched my mother with pity and wondered whether her recovery from sepsis was more cruel than a peaceful ending, Emmah reminded me that life is precious and that we are each in God's hands.

Carers normally take a couple of hours off each day and time for holidays and recreation... Emmah rarely did this and, if she ever had to leave my mother, she would organise cover from her own family to ensure she was cared for properly. In her final bed-bound years when mother hardly knew who I was, my visits were as much to see Emmah as mother. She treated my mother like her own and, in a strange way, I came to love her like my sister – and, of course, she was my sister in Christ. Towards the end of my mother's life Emma flew back to Zimbabwe when her own mother had a stroke and, whilst this parting undoubtedly hastened my mother's death, I was thankful that she could be with her family.



I did it my way...

Emmah was one of God's saints whose life was set on fire by the Holy Spirit, whose language was the language of love, who gave all she had that others could live. She taught me to love the small things in life and those who the world considers a waste of time and space. To see her dancing with my mother to a favourite Frank Sinatra song was to see God's spirit move and heaven come to earth. Emmah was the wind and breath and fire, and the new wine that filled a family home.

Today I live with guilt and regret not simply that I delegated caring to another or that I didn't do enough for my own mother, but that, despite my good intentions, I never caught a plane to Zimbabwe to say a heartfelt "thank you" for all this remarkable woman did. Some 50 days after Passover as Jesus' guilt ridden friends and disciples gathered for Pentecost to give thanks for the first fruits of the harvest, they were swept forward into a brave new world with their lives changed by the Spirit of God who filled their hearts. Some people even imagined they were drunk despite it being early in the morning!

I pray that, as we gradually re-enter the world, we too will be filled with God's Holy Spirit who was both in my sister Emmah and in my brother Jesus.

Yours in Christ,

Vicki
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