

September 2020

Dear Friends,

So much has changed and no I'm not talking about COVID although that has had a great impact. I'm talking about my brother-in-law Doug who had a severe stroke in late January and the impact that has had on both him and my sister-in-law Stella. It has taken a lot of hard physical and emotional work to get them to where they are now. He can now walk - very short distances with a stick but with poor balance. His left arm and hand - his dominant side - are still useless, but he has his speech although his recognition of what is safe and what isn't and his short term memory have been affected.

I find it impossible to imagine what it's like for him and Stella, who still has all her physical and mental faculties but has lost her independence and has become a full time carer. She cannot see how she can still be involved in her gospel choir which rehearses for two hours a week and does regular performances and her drama group which requires a similar commitment. Who will stay with Doug while she does this? The support groups and local charities run by volunteers that would have provided this are not doing so because of social distancing.

Then there is the problem of the home. They live in a little cottage with steps everywhere, a tiny spiral staircase and a 1.2 acre garden with additional paddock and stables. Since he returned home from hospital two weeks before lockdown they have lived in two downstairs rooms. There is no way they can stay there. They must move and find themselves a bungalow with a small garden all on one level. So life must change further and the comfort of the familiar must be left behind and yet more unknown embraced.

Luckily they have embraced this and I've had two visits to help 'house doctor' their home ready for sale. Even that has been painful as they've had to decide what to take and keep and what to get rid of in a time when charity shops are not taking perfectly useable and in many cases much loved items. But on the good side the projected sale price was greatly improved after the 'house doctoring'.

As I think of this and the changes in my life due to lockdown and social distancing I realise that my changes are temporary. One day - although that day may be a long way off yet - my life will be able to go back to pre-COVID. But there will be things I'll miss or am thankful for...

- My husband working from home. That's worked well for both of us and his employer. And I've had the added bonus that with no commute home he chose to take over the cooking - he's a good cook but never had time before.
- Zooming our church services has been successful and continues despite now being able to have services in church.
- The increased contact with family on Zoom and FaceTime. Regular chats through the week when before it was visits a few times a year.
- Relationships with family and friends has become more important and a lot of the peripheries that used to be important no longer are.

I think the last few months has made us all reevaluate so much. Perhaps we all need to 'house doctor' our lives. Throw out the old and in some cases much loved and embrace the new and unknown. To consider the lives of others and become the good neighbour. But let's not forget that there are those in our families and communities whose lives will not revert back, whose lives will have changed forever- due to COVID and other things that would have happened anyway. Let's see if we can be there for them and help them to embrace the new and unknown.

*Rev'd Nicki*