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#33 Tom on Coronavirus, self-isolating and praying through crisis

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

In a podcast special recorded from his home in Oxford where he is self-isolating with his wife Maggie, Tom talks to Justin about the Coronavirus pandemic. They cover: How Christians can maintain spiritual health during isolation, the pastoral implications for churches now and in the future, and why God created a world where disease and sickness exist.

- We are sorry to announce that Unbelievable? the Conference 2020 has postponed. For more details: www.unbelievable.live
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Transcript

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[Music] - Hello, and welcome to a special edition of the Ask NTU. I'd like to be right to anything podcast with me Justin Briley, apologetics and theology editor for Premiere, and

brought to you as ever in partnership with SBCK and NT Right Online. Today is a special edition because we're responding to the coronavirus outbreak.

That means today's show is coming to you from my home and Tom's home as well. I've been recording with him an edition where rather than asking your questions, it's my questions really, but I'm sure the same kinds of questions many people are asking themselves around this pandemic. So we'll be hearing that very shortly.

We've got lots of episodes actually that we've already recorded in studio that we'll be making sure to continue to broadcast and put out on the podcast in future weeks. So do look out on your podcast provider for more episodes of the Ask NTU Right Anything podcast, and you can find videos as well, including today's show over on our social media. We tend to use the unbelievable channel to put out Ask NTU Right Anything video.

So if you want to go over to the Facebook page of Unbelievable, you'll find today's show on video. You'll also find it across the other platforms of Premiere Christian radio as well on Facebook, Twitter, and elsewhere, as well as the YouTube channel for Unbelievable where we host these videos too. So you can find more details from the podcast info, wherever you get your podcast from, just check the info and you'll be there.

And of course you can go to Ask NTU Right.com for more information, to get more details about the show, to ask a question yourself by subscribing. And of course we've got the competition going on at three signed copies of Paul Abargrophy. Be sending those out by the end of April.

You simply need to be subscribed, registered at the website and you'll be automatically entered into that prize draw. Of course, one big announcement I should let you in on is that sadly we have had to inevitably postpone this year's Unbelievable Conference 2020, which was due to include that live audience edition of the Ask NTU Right Anything podcast. So we are postponing that till next year.

All current ticket holders are going to be in contact with and make sure that they know what's happening. And once we've announced a new date, all tickets can be transferred to that date. And of course anyone who can't make the new date that we managed to come up with will of course be refunded.

So that's the sad but inevitable news. It is just one of the many knock on effects of this coronavirus pandemic. So we'll keep you up to date with that as we go along.

For now, let's get into today's special edition of the show with Tom Wright. Tom, thank you very much for joining me today to talk a little bit about the coronavirus pandemic, how Christians are responding, some of the theological issues and pastoral issues that are coming out of this. This of course is affecting everyone, including you and Maggie.

Tell us a bit about how the coronavirus is affecting your day to day life and how things have changed for you, Tom. - Well, things have been changing pretty rapidly. I mean, it's only a week or eight days ago that we were able to go out and go to the shops.

And yeah, take a little bit of precautions, maybe wash your hands more when you come in, but nothing too drastic. And then last Sunday, which was Mothering Sunday, we planned to have our closest family bits of family around the grandchildren. We're eager to see their grandmother particularly.

And then we decided actually they would stay out in the garden and we would talk to them through the kitchen window. So we organized in advance a treasure hunt for the kids in the garden and then they arrived, went into the garden and we observed from a kitchen window all this going on. And I think the kids were a bit puzzled, but I think they realized, no, this makes sense, that and Mum have explained it to us.

And so it's little things like that, we bring it home to you that there's sort of ordinary interactions that you would take for granted. Suddenly, we better not do that. And for us, the particular thing is that Maggie suffers from Asmon, Hasmard, Angina and Phytudite, Beatiz.

And all of those are little triggers that one has heard, might be more at risk from coronavirus. So even though I am, please God, a reasonably healthy person in my old age, we're both over 70 now. So we're in that category as well.

Then I could, if I simply happened to pick up the virus when I was out shopping or something, I might pass it on to Maggie without even realizing I was having it myself. So I'm taking that really quite seriously. We live right in the middle of Oxford and we are fortunate in that though we have a small back garden, which you can walk around in about 20 seconds, the college right opposite us is new college and we are living right opposite their gate.

And they have graciously said we can go and walk around their garden, which is much bigger than our back garden. And that's been a real relief just to be able to get out of the house and not see anybody because there's this beautiful garden with some lovely magnolia trees and till late daffodils and so on with nobody there. And so we've been enjoying that once a day, the last few days and planning on going on doing so.

But it's things like this, which you would normally say just take for granted, which suddenly loom very large and that sort of shifts the balance of everything. And I had to go out this morning, Boris Johnson says we're allowed to go for one bike ride a day. So I went round on my bike and without talking to anybody picked up my mail from college and made that my exercise for the day before we then go for the walk later.

But again, having to think through things like this that you would normally just do

automatically, that's really a challenge. And I'm finding now that I'm reading stuff, I'm working on stuff and everything I do is being colored by, oh my goodness, that would mean going near somebody. That would mean something.

That would mean having to wash your hands. And so we're all internalizing these sudden imperative in a way which is really crowding out one's kind of emotional reactions to all sorts of other things. So it's just very odd.

And I said to somebody recently, it's like a strange sort of lent. In lent you give up this or you take up that. Well, we're not just giving up sort of whiskey or chocolate or whatever and not just taking up reading some improving book, we're giving up all kinds of things and we're taking up all kinds of things, regular hand washing, wiping door handles and that sort of thing.

But the problem is that whereas with lent, we say, well, those three weeks and then it'll be good Friday and Easter, we do not know if there will be a good Friday moment when the death toll will rise to some horrendous unless alone there will be an Easter moment in two months, in four months, in a year, we just don't know. And that is really scary. All sorts of things one takes for granted are just absolutely put on ice.

And I suspect that up and down the country, lots of people are just scratching their heads and feeling this is a very puzzling moment. Anyways, that's how it is for us right now. - Hugely helpful in a sense just to hear those kinds of sentiments that obviously everyone's in the same boat right now.

And the real challenge I think for many people is the fact that their regular routine has completely changed, they're adapting to very different circumstances and so on. And for me, I suppose one of the knock-on effects of all of this, quite apart from those who potentially are going to be suffering from the coronavirus, is just simply the effects of social isolation. Now, for someone who is effectively self-isolating, it has to be completely cut off.

And that includes most of us these days, we will all be encouraged to stick to just our family unit if possible. What is your advice to someone to keep them, engage spiritually nourished, when perhaps they relied on their faith community, the church and so on for that? - That is a real, real problem. We humans in general are designed to be social beings.

There's a very small number of people who seem to be able to do without social interaction for extended periods of time. But most of us, that's not the case. And most of us are social interaction, goes much, much wider naturally than the people who live in the same house as us.

There was a letter in the paper yesterday, some women saying, "I've been around the

house all day, "and there's this strange man who is here all the time." And he says, "He's married to me." In other words, this is just, we're not used to being like this. But I think particularly from a Christian point of view, maintaining spiritual disciplines, I mean, there are those of us who have a lifelong habit of having an extended time of Bible reading and prayer in the morning by ourselves, and that can continue, and maybe this would be a good time to extend that. - Start it for the first time for those of you.

- Or maybe, absolutely. Absolutely, if the start habits like that for the first time. And maybe midday prayer, and maybe evening prayer, a compliment, whatever, there is space in the day now, which maybe there wasn't before, but say, "Okay, at noon we will stop everything, "and we will read a Psalm and say a prayer "and say the Lord's prayer," or whatever it is.

Or at evening time before dinner, or maybe after dinner, we would read, "Complin or evening prayer," or something, and these things are readily available online, by the way, you can get all kinds of prayer book resources online, so it's not a matter of, "Oh dear, I don't have the book." No excuse, it's all there readily available online. As long as everybody's internet keeps working, and as long as the electricity keeps working, and all those things. But that would be really good.

And I think particularly, as we hear the news looking around the world, to look out beyond ourselves, to think about people in Northern Italy, facing a lot of people dying, to think about people in Iran, particularly our Christian brothers and sisters in Iran, who've been facing terrible struggles because of restrictions anyway, and because of all the things that have been going on, in terms of sanctions. And so when we read a song of lament, actually to have before our eyes and our hearts, people, either we know or we've seen on the television, or whatever, who are in real, real trouble, much worse trouble than just having to stay indoors all day, in Britain, and to share the lament with them. And I'll maybe say more about lament in a minute, because I think it's very, very important to relearn the discipline of lament at a time like this.

- You're a historian of the early church, Tom. What would you say is the response we've seen in past years, in past millennia, when the church have responded to pandemics? This is obviously isn't the first time. It's the first time we are so connected in a sense, in our response.

But what has the church traditionally done in Thai crisis? - The received wisdom, and this is all written up in various church historians. I mean, think of Rodney Starks book, *The Rise of Christianity*, I think has a whole chapter on it. That quite frequently in the ancient world, you would have a plague striking a city or a whole region, and particularly a low-lying city, very damp climate, maybe mosquitoes or other bugs who are carrying disease, maybe rats, et cetera, think back long before the early church to the great plague in Athens in the 420s BC, famously written up by few cities, 'cause it was during

the Peloponnesian War, and Pericles, the great leader himself, died of plague in the middle of that.

And I think we have forgotten that actually plagues like famines and earthquakes and so on, are simply parts of the way the world is. We post-enlightenment people have got used to thinking that if anything goes wrong, there's probably a pill for it, and somebody is responsible for making sure that we don't have to suffer, that we'll get better soon. And actually, most of history has not been like that.

And actually, this has never been seen by Christians as a problem in terms of, oh my goodness, it's got out of control, or is this a sign of the end times or whatever? It's just, this is normal life, like getting illnesses is normal anyway, like cancer is normal anyway, like finally dying is normal anyway. And in most times of history, most people have not lived beyond childhood, let alone beyond the age of 15 to 20, let alone to be the age that I am now. Even if I dare say so, you Justin, and most people didn't live to your young age, let alone to my old age.

And so we have been cossited against the realities. And so what would happen when a plague would strike a city in say the second or third or fourth century? We don't have much evidence from the first century, but in the immediately subsequent centuries would be that the Christians took this as a call to look after people, to nurse people, any Christian doctors would say, right, this is what I'm here for. I have to stay a nurse people, and the rich and respectable and the pagan doctors would take to the hills.

They would get out of town fast rather than be caught in this plague. Leave that lot to die, that's what they're gonna do. And the Christians would stay a nurse people.

And that is actually one of the reasons why people became Christian, because they looked at these funny Christians and they'd always thought were weird for all the usual reasons. And they said, why did you do that? Why did you come and nurse us? We're not your family, we're not your tribe as it were. And they would say it's because we follow this man called Jesus who went about doing good and touching lepers and touching corpses and risking uncleanness in order to bring health.

And so of course some of the Christians would die and others wouldn't, but would be able to or come through and ill this and out the other side. And this was an extraordinary witness. Now I'm not saying that therefore all Christians should rush out and find coronavirus patients and lay hands on them or whatever.

There may be some who are called to that kind of ministry. Obviously this doesn't mean that we can ignore public health instructions. And it's very interesting of course, the medical profession in the early church was doing the best science they could as well as the best praying they could.

And this isn't an either or. We need both. We need the wisdom that comes from prayer and the compassion for our neighbors.

And we need the best science that is available. And the Jewish and Christian traditions have always been very clear about that. So there's a kind of a mixed reaction, but I do want to hedge it around by saying this would not be seen as something unusual.

Yes, it's pretty terrible. But there were famines that affected the whole world. We read about them in acts.

And so what did the church in Antioch do when they heard there was a famine on the way? They knew that the Christians in Jerusalem were very poor and were being persecuted. So their instant reaction was to raise money and send people to go and help. And whatever the equivalent of that is, that's what we should be doing around the world.

And I think particularly of our Christian brothers and sisters in China, in Iran, they have a hard time anyway. And we are their brothers and sisters. We need to do everything we can, starting with praying and working out from there for their sake, as well as the people on our doorstep who we can still help.

- Obviously that raises the whole much larger and frankly a question that we'll struggle to really deal with properly just in this recording, but that question of the problem of suffering and evil. And why does God allow something like coronavirus, pandemics to exist? Why if he is a good God, has he created a world in which these kinds of things can occur? I mean, again, huge theological question, but if you were to give us your no, your five minute take on it, where would you begin with that kind of a question? - I would begin with Jesus tears at the tomb of his friend. Jesus goes to Bethany knowing that Lazarus has died and Jesus knows what he is intending to do.

He is having prayed to the father. He is going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He comes to share the grief of Mary and Martha and the village and Jesus himself weeps at the tomb of his friend.

And John's gospel is very clear that when we're looking at Jesus, we are seeing what and who the true God really is. John says, no one has ever seen God, the only begotten son who's in the bosom of the father, he has made him known. And so often we particularly in the post-enlightenment rationalist world, we Christians have tried to say, oh, if I was God, I would do it like this.

Or supposing God is omnipotent and omniscient, then this is what he ought to do. And we have this picture of God, sometimes called a classical theological picture of God. Then we try and fit Jesus into it.

They can't be done. Paul insists that you mustn't do it that way. John doesn't want you to do it that way.

The letter to the Hebrews is going against you when you do it that way. Only when you look at Jesus, do you see who God is? And the answer is God knows the pain and the sorrow of the world. And God has come with his own grief to share in that.

Go back to Genesis when God looks at the wickedness of the world and it grieves him to his heart. That note of the grief of God is then shared with God's people, with Jesus himself as the archetypal, a human being who is the image of God. But then by the spirit, with the praying and lamenting people of God.

And so the bit that goes with John 11, the tears of Jesus in Paul in Romans eight is when Paul says that the spirit groans within us as we ourselves are groaning within the pain of the world. Paul has what we call a high pneumatology, a high doctrine of the spirit as far as Paul is concerned. The spirit is the personal presence of the living God, living within us, loving within and through us.

And the spirit is groaning and the Father is listening to that. And we are shaped according to the pattern of the Son. So when people say, oh God surely would do this or shouldn't do that or whatever, I wanna say, which God are we talking about? The triune God of the New Testament, the Father, Son, Spirit, God of the New Testament is the God who comes and gets his hands dirty.

In fact, his hands mailed to the cross in order to share the pain. This is a great mystery. It's not what we in the modern rationalistic West would like to think about particularly.

But so when then I read the Psalms and the Psalms of lament, I realized that God has given to his people the means of Godly lament saying, why is this going on? What's it all about? And sometimes, yes, those Psalms then turn a corner and come out into the light. But sometimes they don't. Psalm 89 goes the other way.

It starts very cheerfully. I mean, halfway through it says, oh dear, it's all gone horribly wrong. Where are your loving mercies, O Lord? And the Psalm leaves it at that.

And the Psalm before that, Psalm 88, which is a self-isolating Psalm if you like, ends up, lovers and friends, you have put far from me. And darkness is my only companion. As I pray Psalm 88 right now, I'm thinking about people for whom, self-isolation really is like a little death, a matter of darkness.

But I want to say that's the point at which we find out who God really is, the God of all compassion who comes to be with us in that darkness. That's where we have to start, not with this big rational picture of, if I were God, I would organize the world differently. Sorry, we're in the world that God has made.

Unfortunately, we know the human face of God in Jesus and the breath of God, which is the Holy Spirit. - I mean, one perspective that I found helpful myself when dealing with those big questions of God and suffering and natural evil especially, is that it sometimes

helps to not necessarily see it simply as well, God is simply this omnipotent being that could simply plug in whatever he wants to in this world because God has created this world with a certain amount of freedom, both in the human realm and the spiritual realm. And to some extent, a lot of people would say, coronavirus and so on is a result of a world that's fallen, that is out of kilter with the way it will be one day when God restores and renews all things.

And in that sense, I often feel that rather than saying, "Why doesn't God do something about this?" As you say, God is already doing something about it, but we are part of that, what Paul talks about in Ephesians, that battle that is going on in the heavenly places. And that can apply to something like a virus pandemic, even though it's - Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, there's two quite different things which the New Testament simply holds intention and which I think is part of what it means that God has already launched his kingdom on earth as in heaven with the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the spirit, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the gift of the spirit.

But yes, the battle continues and every aspect of death, whether it's the sin that leads to death or the death that comes from sickness or whatever, every aspect of death is a sneer in the face of God. It's a way of saying, "Your creation doesn't really work," et cetera. And God will not forever be mocked by that sneer.

That's really important to say, when the Psalmist celebrates that God is coming to judge the world, which means to put it right, he will judge the world with righteousness and the people's with his tooth and the trees in the field will clap their hands and the rivers will shout for joy and the sheep and the animals will be celebrating. And as for us humans, we will be wild with delight. Now, that's the good news.

That is the gospel. When people talk about preaching the gospel, the gospel is rooted in God's promise to put everything right at last. It then comes into focus with Jesus through whom God does the putting right thing, close up and personal.

And then the believing in the gospel for us today is believing that something has happened in Jesus as a result of which the world is a different place, even though I am still heading for death, I am still a sinner, et cetera. But in the spirit, I am enabled to live at that overlap of the ages. That's what I call to, not to cheap theories about what God must be doing in this crisis or whatever, but simply to say, okay, this is actually part of the downside of normal.

We shouldn't have thought it was abnormal. Of course, it's unusual to have a pandemic like this made possible by our multiple air travel and everything else that goes on. They couldn't really easily have pandemics in the ancient world because people tended to stay where they were.

This is the downside of the upside that we can hop on planes normally and be the other

side of the world in half a day. But so we've got to get use then to thinking more biblically about how God is and who God is within his world. Here in the UK, we're just starting to see that upward curve.

And all the advice, of course, is about flattening that curve and trying to make sure that the health system isn't overwhelmed and so on. But inevitably, this will result in a number of deaths. And for many church leaders involved in giving pastoral care, counselling, dealing with grieving families, that's going to be especially difficult, I think.

And of course, many more funerals potentially are going to be, have to be, happen. And obviously in very difficult circumstances, the coronavirus means, for instance, that many points loved ones can't be with their relatives when they're in their last moments because of the restrictions and so on. Funerals will inevitably have to be very small localised affairs and so on.

So all of that makes pastoral care that much more difficult and that much more stressful to deliver for people in the ground. Any advice, really? Absolutely. And I've just been thinking about that.

I mean, we have, I was saying to Maggie the other day, pretty soon somebody we know is going to get this disease. And it's happened a couple of days ago, somebody who's a close personal friend, we've heard from his boss, his wife, that he's in hospital in intensive care. We don't know the exact situation.

But that brings it home and you're just in prayer, you think, Lord, well, so what then? Supposing he dies, then what sort of funeral could there be? And surely, I want to get a message from him. I want to be there with him. I want to pray with him and know you can't.

The hospital won't let you in. And this is really unprecedented and very, very difficult. I mean, I suppose one can only say it's like what has often happened, alas, in some of the great wars.

I mean, I was reading the other day a book by a guy who was a Japanese POW during the Second World War and he was a doctor and saw many, many people that he knew, including other medical professionals in the Japanese POW camps simply dying without any hope of consolation, without any funeral or anything, just being thrown in a pit somewhere. And I think that's something, again, to sort of second order lament, that we should lament the fact that we can't do our ordinary lamenting. And then I think we have to be prepared for the fact that when this you and cried eyes down, whether that's in three months or six months or a year, then there will be a huge wave of displaced grief and that that will come out in difficult ways, grief, even when you have a proper funeral, when you can say goodbye to someone you love, grief still comes in waves and it's difficult to cope with and it has been off results.

This is going to be big and we need to prepare ourselves and church leaders need to prepare themselves for that. In the meantime, thank God for the internet, which has so many downsides, but the upside is that we can do sharing, as you and I are at the moment, on a Zoom meeting or a Skype meeting or whatever. We can do that.

I was talking to a friend in America the other day who said that she's been to several Zoom parties where a couple of dozen friends all get together and there they all are and they're talking and waving and so on. And that may sound a bit odd and silly, but maybe it's the kind of oddness we need to embrace right now, the creative about it. I did watch a service broadcast in this diocese on Sunday morning broadcast by the bishop and the dean from the cathedral.

Obviously, there were a few other people there all keeping a safe distance, but that was something they were able to hold on. Here was the liturgy, here were the prayers, here were the readings, here was a communion service. But we weren't able to partake physically, but we could do it visually, which is, of course, what they used to do in the Middle Ages, when they had plagues and so on in the Middle Ages.

People maybe, or if there were people suffering from serious sickness, they had to stay outside the church and people created sight-lined little peat bowls through which they could see the liturgy going on. And we in the post-reformation West think, "Oh, that's so medieval." Well, that's what it was. But maybe we need to recover some of that ancient wisdom, that being able to see things, even if we can't touch or be touched, maybe that's better than nothing at all.

And so I think there's a lot of fresh wisdom needed at precisely that point. - I couldn't agree more, Tom. In the sense that, you know, I think churches, if they ever weren't engaged in the internet, now this will force them to do so.

- Yeah. - Our own experiences, as you know, my wife's the Minister of the United Reforms Church, and obviously, like many churches last weekend, were unable to hold a service in our church. And because we, our person is a family, currently in self-isolation, there's a couple of coughs, no major illnesses, thankfully.

- Sure. - But nonetheless, following the government, nonetheless, following the guidelines about, you know, keeping out, we did literally a homemade church from our front room. And we put this out on our Facebook Live, sort of post on our Facebook channel and so on.

And the extraordinary thing was, you know, we may be gathered, you know, 150 to 200 people on a Sunday morning. This post has had about 3,500 views. - Wow, yeah.

- And some of the most unlikely people coming out of the woodwork to watch it and comment on it and say that they felt inspired and encouraged by the message

themselves. - That's wonderful. - And so inevitably, I mean, just as we start to draw this together, on a note of hope in a sense, can you imagine what God might be able to do through even something as awful as the coronavirus crisis? - Yes, I mean, the God we believe in, who we see in Jesus, is precisely the God who takes the very worst thing that can possibly happen, and transforming it into something extraordinary and brilliant and loving and good and creative.

And so the death of Jesus is the paradigm for that. And it seems to me, rather than try to say, oh, maybe God will do this or that, though I do believe God will do creative things to it, I find myself wanting to say, and this for me as an ordained Anglican priest, this is part of what it means to celebrate the Eucharist. And I'm actually wondering whether I ought to be celebrating Eucharist at home, weekly or daily or whatever.

It's not something I've been doing, because I go to church for that. But maybe we should, but what I found again and again in pastoral ministry is that all the bad things that are going on in the community where I've ministered wherever it's been. I can't solve them, I can't say what God is doing, but I can gather them up, and when I come to the Lord's table, I can leave them there because the bread and the wine are the signs and the physical symbols of the fact that in the death of Jesus and then in his risen life, God takes all the brokenness of the world and holds onto it in his love and his grief.

And our part is not to say, now God, it's time you did this and this and this, our part is just to say, okay, thank you, we'll leave it there and we'll trust that good things will come out, even though at the moment we can't second guess what they might be. - We can't second guess them. One guess I would hazard, I suppose, is that it is in times of crisis that people realise what is really important.

- Oh yeah, absolutely. - And that is obviously relationships, first and foremost, for most people. - Absolutely.

- You know, we can't go out in our, we can't enjoy most of the things we've accumulated at this point in the ways that we do. - Absolutely, I mean, small but significant example, my grandchildren are now being homeschooled by their parents. Well, well, that's an interesting turn up for the books and they're getting stuck in and they're figuring out how to do it.

And this morning we got a lovely little WhatsApp message, which was a seven-year-old granddaughter reciting a poem that she'd just learned. And we probably wouldn't have seen her reciting a poem had it not been that we're isolated, they're isolated and that's what they're doing. And I think there may be many different types of connection which are being made there, which may be very creative and fruitful.

And we may look back, you know, maybe that's one of the things when I'm even older and grislier than I am now, but I will have beside me and it'll be a happy memory. And

maybe there will be good memories as well as really, really sad ones coming out. - I think what we're all wondering is how ultimately this pandemic may change the world in significant ways going forward.

And obviously we will respond as we meet those challenges. - Absolutely, and what it'll do to the ecological crisis. I mean, people have been saying cheerfully, well, at least the skies are clear over Wuhan now, whereas they were polluted before.

Well, yes, but what cost? But Bill, I was thinking about this in relation to the previous crisis, the global financial crisis in 2008, when people have said, you know, oh, well, our government gave a great lead to the world. It said, well, it didn't, it didn't. The thing that really depressed me and I was in the House of Lords for the debate about it in November 2008, November, September, whenever it was, is that the main concern of everybody was how to get the banks doing business again.

In other words, yeah, we'll wait for two seconds and we'll give those naughty bankers a wrap over their knuckles, but then let's get it back as quick as we can. And so the lesson was we're not learning a lesson. We just wanna go back and carry on doing the same stuff.

Now, wouldn't it be wonderful if this time we could all say, no, actually we're not gonna go back and do the same stuff. Maybe we should be flying a lot less. And I speak as one who is a frequent flyer.

Maybe we should be more Benedictine about saying, stability is what matters. Maybe we need to stay where we are and resist the temptation to go rushing around the world or even the city or even the country. There are all sorts of knock-on effects of this.

And again, I'm not second-guessing them. I'm just saying maybe perhaps whatever and in prayer and through the presence of Jesus in the sacrament, then I think we should be able to find wisdom to feel our way forwards in the dark 'cause that's what we're doing right now. - And as we close, Tom, I wonder if you would pray for anyone watching or listening, who may be at this point anxious or fearful and pray for the church as well as we seek to respond carefully, pastrillion and with wisdom to this situation.

- Okay, let's pray. Gracious Father, on the cross, your son prayed, my God, my God, why did you abandon me? I want to pray just now for all the people around the world who find themselves saying that, whether or not they know that text, find themselves feeling that, they feel abandoned by you, by their fellow human beings, by family who can't see them, whatever. Father, in the name of your son, Jesus and in the power of his spirit, will you come and be with them? Be with all of us.

Be with your suffering world at this time. Give us fresh resources of courage and faith and hope. Give to our leaders worldwide the wisdom, the scientific wisdom, the faith

wisdom that they need to say the right things, to encourage people.

We pray especially for the doctors and nurses and all the medical professionals and researchers looking for vaccines, we pray that ways forward may be found, that unnecessary deaths may be stopped and the proper care may be given to those who are now inevitably dying. We pray for all those who are seriously ill right now, finding breathing difficult, finding maybe they don't have the sufficient supply of oxygen, whatever it is. Gracious Lord, be near them, be with them.

Bring good out of this trouble. And Father, as you have promised that one day the earth shall be full of the knowledge and glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Give us even in the present time, a foretaste, a glimpse of that and help us to live by that glimpse, to live in hope and to become in our turn, people of hope, people through whom hope can come to your wounded and waiting world.

We pray it all in Jesus' name and for his sake, amen. (gentle guitar music) - Thanks for listening to today's show. A little bit of a different one, obviously more rough and ready than our studio level production, but we have got lots of those episodes actually coming to you in the pipeline.

We've got some recorded stuff from our studio that we'll be making sure goes out on the podcast in future weeks. And the next one we're due to broadcast actually is going to be the evening with NT Wright that was recorded in London a few weeks ago. This was before there were major restrictions on gatherings of course, although we do mention the coronavirus as part of the Q&A that takes place after Tom's talk.

So look out for that. That'll be next up in your podcast feed here on the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast. Find out more about the show in your podcast info or over at askNT Wright.com where you can find extra videos, bonus content and of course by subscribing to the askNT Wright.com newsletter, you will of course get updates, bonus content and entry into all the prize draws and of course the chance to ask a question yourself.

So do feel free to do that. Thank you very much for being with us on today's edition of the show. And we'll see you next time.

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