

Opoho Psalms & Other Writings

from around the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown



*Psalm Writing Group
Opoho Presbyterian Church*

July 2020

The cover photo was taken by Tui
when Kirsten's family came to cheer her up on James's birthday,
15 April 2020,
after she had sent Kirsten her newly penned poem, *Living Over*.
Tui stood across the road and couldn't help but feel happier
as she watched Kirsten's family blow thousands of bubbles
that slowly drifted up Signal Hill Road, bringing smiles to the walkers
and occasional car drivers who found themselves in a cloud of bubbles.

Introduction

2020 is a year we will not forget. We, along with the whole world, encountered covid-19 and life would never be the same. Things we never could have imagined have happened, and things we thought were always there for us became inaccessible. We were told to stay home in our bubble, we could not go to church, we could not be in community, even for funerals. And we did it – because most of us recognised the alternative was unacceptable.

Much of our safe and planned life has been turned on its head and even now as I write in late July, our relatively pleasant bubble that is NZ is only a breath away from more lockdown. Life *will* never be the same again.

Yet it was hard – to not meet, to not hug, to not celebrate and console in person. And it had a profound impact on many people. Those of us who have a faith might call it a time of revelation – about the ways of the world and our response. The shallowness of our world and some people in it has been exposed in graphic detail and we weep at the pain and loss for so many people. The love and compassion of our world and some people in it has been highlighted in so many ways that we feel we have rediscovered humanity. Our planet has been able to breathe again and we have had time to reflect.

These writings from the Opoho Psalm Writing Group tell some of our story in the midst of the pandemic – our hopes and fears, our delights and our prayers, the ways in which our faith was both challenged and revealed, the presence of God in our lives in a different way. Some are a cry to God from the heart, some are comments on society, others are very personal revelations and yet others are reflections on our vulnerabilities and the way that God spoke into our hearts in this time.

We pray they will speak to you in some way and encourage you to reflect on the new revelations of the presence of God in a time of lockdown.

Opoho Psalm Writing Group

*Abby's
Psalms & Other Writings*

A Lenten Pandemic Prayer

Good morning, Lord. It is Lent. This is the time when people traditionally give something up or maybe add in something new. A special time for reflection. We do this with different goals: to sacrifice as he did; to focus on important things; to revise, to reset, to reschedule. To become changed.

Lord, this year, we are all doing Lent, whether we like it or not. We are giving up hand-shaking. No passing of the peace, no hugs. No church, no parties, no weddings. We are adding in more hand-washing, thinking about distance. We are focusing on what's important. We are sacrificing our freedom for the greater good: revising our plans, cancelling travel, going to work when we thought we were done, not going to work when we thought we were busy. No doubt, we will all be changed.

The question is – how? We are not passive ragdolls, tossed about by random events. We have choices. We are the active creators of our own life stories. Will we become fearful and angry? Will we retract, constrict, hide? Will we refuse, deny, break the rules? Will we give up? Perhaps some will.

Lord, we ask, with all our hearts, this Lent, and this Pandemic, for your help. If we are to be changed, if the world is resetting, let it be guided by and grounded in your love. We ask for the chance, Lord, to know what's right, and for the courage to do it. We ask for this new space and time we are given to be positive, maybe even fruitful.

Today, we pray for everyone on this troubled beautiful globe, every single person, every one of your beloved people. Everyone here, everyone there. May we all be changed. May we find grace and love, compassion and care, now, in a Lenten Pandemic, and always.

Amen.

Abby Smith

20 March 2020

Just as the Pandemic began



Abigail Smith

25 April · 



I know that wars are stupid and destructive and that battles, killing and death are nothing to celebrate. Not today, not ever.

I know that many of the events we remember today were nationalist, colonialist, racist, and sexist: nothing to celebrate. Not today, not ever.

But I also know that good men and women all over the world gave everything they had, in the belief that they were defending their culture, their community, and their country.

And I know that everything is complicated. Everything has good and bad, darkness and light. I celebrate the greatness, the courage, the belief. I remember the dead, the broken, the traumatised, the destroyed.

But also I celebrate peace, recovery, wisdom, friends and allies.

So I got up in the dark and walked out to the end of my driveway and there I stood. The noise of a radio could be heard, and lights were on in some houses. A trumpet floated The Last Post over the valley. I was not alone.

Anzac Day 2020



Nancy Buell, Therissa Libby and 29 others

10 comments

Sunday morning alone

It is ten am on Sunday and suddenly
 I feel flat, lost, wrong.
Where am I? Where are they?
 I know where they are not.

Nobody is turning on the hot water, setting out the cups.
Nobody is practicing an unfamiliar hymn on the organ.
Nobody is setting out crayons and small scissors.
The building squats silently like the pile of bricks it is.

It is ten am on Sunday and I suppose I do know where they are.
 They are where I am.
 Home. Not out. Staying In.
I want them to do that.
 Stay apart to stay safe.

No combing hair, putting on nice coat.
No remembering to bring cans for the food bank.
No hurrying to pick up older neighbours on time.
The building waits silently for anyone to come.

It is ten am on Sunday
 Dull, dark, alone, bored,
We are not bathed in the glow of sun through coloured glass.
 We shelter in place.

We are not standing together singing
We are not sitting intently listening
We are not laughing together at a child's antics
The building sits silently listening for any small noise.

It is ten am on Sunday
 And I miss you all.

Abby Smith 3 May 2020

Sunday morning together

Sunday morning dawns late and cold in June--
but suddenly I am smiling.

Today the hot water will be turned on, the cups will be set out
Today the organ will play, the people will sing
Today children will drop crayons and make noise
Today the doors will open.

Zoom contact and videos at home were okay --
but going out is better.

Let's comb our hair, fumble around in the closet for the nice coat.
Let's remember the name tags and cans for the food bank
Let's greet each other on the way up the hill, wave, laugh, smile
Today the doors will open.

Leave the dark and silence and loneliness behind --
shed the old skin and emerge new and shining.

Come! to stand together singing
Come! to sit and listen and pray
Come! to laugh together
Today the doors will open.

Open the doors! Start the music! Turn on the sunshine! Praise the Lord!
It is 10 am on Sunday...
and we are together again!

Abby Smith

7 June 2020

Psalm 2020: Calling for Change

I imagine the Earth as a woman.

She is old but upright, sitting heavy in her rocking chair,
The cloak of the starry sky around her shoulders, a blue ocean blanket in her lap.

She sits knitting: making forests, ferns, flowers; making birds, bugs, bats;
making fish, frogs, lizards, lions...

And she says

What does it take? What do I have to do?
Death, extinction, fire, flood, heatwave, drought
When will you listen? When will you learn?
When will you change? Turn Back O Man.

I imagine god, not an old white man in the sky,

But a great creative swirling fire of love and grace and hope.

God made manifest in all the glory of the Earth and Sky, Sea and Forests;
Smallest virus to largest whale, God who made it all and us all...

And he says

What does it take? What do I have to do?
Death, starvation, plague, pandemic, riots, protests
When will you listen? When will you learn?
When will you change? Turn Back O Man.

I imagine Jesus, who was just a man,

But not just a man, god walking with us

He who came singing love and condemned by hate

He who came singing peace and was killed...

And he says

What does it take? What do I have to do?
The stories couldn't be more clear.
I died, not for other people, not for a cause. For You.
When will you listen? When will you learn?
When will you change? Turn Back O Man.

I imagine people, a great crowd of people, all colours,

All ages, speaking hundreds of languages

They are artists, singers, athletes, teachers, nurses, writers, bakers, cleaners;

Children, adults, parents, grandparents...

And they say

What does it take? What do we have to do?

Inequality, injustice, racism, sexism, poverty, starvation

When will you listen? When will you learn?

When will you change? Turn Back O Man.

I look around and I see people with ears who will not listen.

I see people with minds who will not learn.

I see people with eyes who will not see.

Why not? Power, money, ego, ignorance, lethargy, apathy, helplessness

Pathetic excuses, dulled thoughts, broken hearts...

Earth and God and Jesus and the hearts of the people are calling for change.

What does it take?

Turn Back O Man.

Abby Smith

June 2020

During a tough year of pandemic, protest, wildfires, and climate continuing to change, a resonant call from the heart for someone, somehow, to do something. Knowing all the time -- that someone is us.

Andrew's Psalm

Intercessory Psalm during Covid-19

Ah, dear Lord, we have come to pray, we have come to make intercession,
we have come to give thanks.

We have come into your house, we have been working from home,
you have been working from home, among us.

Now we are out and about in our own country, and we hope that you are out
and about, in your own world.

You are needed in so many places, Lord of all places, so rise up on wings of
the Spirit, and take us with you –

because there are so many places around the world that during this time
we cannot visit,

unless we travel with you to there, on your wings of prayer, and love,

because at this time, the foundations of our world are being shaken,

so we can only be secure if the Spirit lifts us into the air, over mountain and
valley,

and we travel on currents where the Spirit will take us, and see with the focus
of the eagle's eye.

We leave behind illusions of safety and security, and travel with you,
the wild and untamed God.

We come to prayer, as the people, first in the beginning of the day,
as your quickening ray, shines the glow of the day on us.

We do not hold on it, it is your free gift, your solar light and love on all people.

Shine your light around the world, where it is needed,

in situations where people are fighting to breathe,

whether from the pandemic of Covid-19, or from the pandemic of injustice,

you are always the next person over, the one standing beside us,

the one standing with us.

Shine your light around the world, hour by hour, from Tonga to the Aleutian
islands,

because in a time of global lock-down, there are still people recovering from
disaster,

and our help must be hands off, it must be by the people on the ground;

And there is still actions of injustice, there are actions of oppression,

there are the secret shadowy agencies whose work must be uncovered, and

shouted from roof-tops, you stand with them against agencies we cannot
know or imagine – let your light be our disinfectant.

We pray for our leadership in this time, we hear so much that is driven by fear, uncertainty, and doubt, we still have time before our next election, so against fear let us respond with kindness and hospitality that is part of our gospel wisdom.

Guide our leaders and our government, guard all vulnerable and dependent on care, keep them safe.

Strengthen our hands, our wisdom, and our decision-making.

Your light is a fire, it is warmth and comfort. We have come into the cold part of the year.

Yet we have hope, we have promise. We are watching the sky to see the sun turn south again.

We are watching to count the lengthening hours of the day.

Shine your light, here and there, and in all places where we are thinking of people and family we care for, and we cannot meet again until it is safe to travel.

We are keeping them in our hearts, and we are naming them to you.

May we continue to welcome the stranger, and those who are coming home from the sea.

May we continue to be surprised as we welcome the new and the unknown for the sake of your generous gospel.

A prayer used for intercession and thanksgiving on the service at Opoho Church for 12 July 2020 led by the Rev. Paul Ranby. It gave me an opportunity to lead prayer on the themes of Covid-19, Black Lives Matter and the death of George Floyd, the approaching election in New Zealand, and the fear and anxiety caused by the return of migrant New Zealanders chafing under enforced isolation after arrival and attempting to escape from it. I wrote it after a session of psalms written during the Covid-19 lock-down, and I was invited to include the prayer with them as my contribution.

Andrew Smith

*Candi's
Psalms & Other Writings*

Meditations from Lockdown

Numbers

Lockdown 2020
here we are suspended
in time...waiting

watching and listening
to the daily news numbering
the days of our existence
in this strange limbo-land
numbering the new cases
of people with the virus
numbering the deaths

we can number new meanings
for lockdown, isolation, bubble
Zooming, which now requires
no movement at all

none of this was expected
New Year's Day came
and went as usual
with parties and fireworks
Auld Lang Syne
the forecasts revealed
no signs of a coming storm

but like the thief in the night
it came

One of the upsides of the COVID-19 lockdown was that it gave me time to ponder and write. I still have some half-finished pieces from those few months, but this was one that I did manage to complete.

Candi Young

Psalm for creation – and new creation

God, you have told us about the time when there was darkness
a darkness complete in and of itself
impenetrable, boundless, unfathomable
and yet from this darkness you brought to birth light
starlight, sunlight, an incandescent dance
of colours, shades and hues
and you brought to birth life
your limitless imagination
filled the planet with abundance.

From darkness came creation—
there was nothing and then
there was a universe
and it was infused with your energy
and soaked in your goodness.

God, you have told us about the time when Jesus died
and there was darkness, roiling darkness
thunder-clouded with wrath
pierced through with unfathomable grief
and yet from this darkness you brought to birth light
and you brought to birth life
life and light entwined, mysteriously
perfected through the pain and suffering of birth.

New creation, your kingdom, indestructible hope
charged through with your incandescent love.

God of creation, I am amazed by you
God of light, I bask in your goodness
God of life, I sing to you.

Note about the psalm: This Easter, in my readings, I was struck by the parallel between the darkness after Jesus died and the darkness at the beginning of all things, and how from both darknesses came creation...from the first darkness was born a perfect world, which we ruined, and from the second darkness the kingdom of God came into being.

I was also influenced by Psalm 47 with its encouragement to praise and make music to God.

Candi Young

Psalm of petition in the time of COVID-19

Lord, you are our shelter and our strength
our help in tough times, always there for us to find.
We've read these words many times, can quote them, sing them. We have
our favourite passages about faith
 enduring despite trials and tribulations,
 overcoming fear and uncertainty,
 guiding Abraham, Joseph, David, Mary, Paul
 and many more in scripture and in history.

And here we are now in 2020
 with a virus invading the world
 spreading tentacles of sickness and fear.

Our comfortable rug has been ripped from underneath our feet
 and we are stumbling, confused, overwhelmed.
We worry that we're over-reacting; we worry
 that we are not taking it as seriously as we should.
We want to be kept informed; we wish we weren't.
We want to visit people so they don't feel alone
 but what if we infect them
 or they us?
We want to be like those early Christians
 whose faith led them to nurse the sick
 when the plagues hit,
but to protect our elderly parents and our children
we need to protect ourselves and stay home.
Between the idea and the reality falls the shadow of doubt.

So Lord, today, please help us to hear your voice
help us in these strange and destabilising times
 to be still and know you are God.

Note: I wrote this psalm on the weekend of March 21-22, when we were still in Alert Level 2. I had my kids urging me (quite stridently!) to make a case with my boss for working at home (being in the over 60s age group), there was a lot of bad news coming in from Europe at that stage and many discussions raging on the news media and internet. It was unsettling and discombobulating, and I almost felt under siege. There are many psalms and passages (and I was thinking specifically of Psalms 46

and 91) offering comfort in tribulation, but reading the words and living the words are two different things.

Candi Young

*Margaret's
Psalms & Other Writings*

Level 4

Silence
Can you hear it?
It's everywhere
No cars
No machines
No planes and boats and trains
Birds chatter
Water gurgles
Creation breathes deeply
Peace

April 2002

Notes: *I would not be the only one that revelled in the quiet of lockdown.*

Margaret Garland

Here You Are, God

Here on this hill you seem especially present
Here where the sound is distant
Here where the wind is alert
Here where the birdsong provides the nuances of early morning –
eager and contemplative, busy and strident
Here where the clouds dance with an emerging sun –
each wishing to take the lead position
Here where the trees sway gently and the large dead tree draws the
eye
to its lines of elegance and difference
Here where I give you room to be
Thank you God of the hilltop

March 2020

Notes: Written in March before the full impact of the pandemic had made itself clear, this was shaped by a need for space and peace in the midst of a roller coaster of emotion around ending ministry at Opoho Church.

Margaret Garland

Me

I stand at the top of the hill and pray eagerly and fluently for the world:
It's only when I start going down that I remember to pray for me!

April 2020

Notes: *The monument at the top of Signal Hill became my church,
my sacred space – often just me – a place for prayer and
revelation*

Margaret Garland

Ordinary

It was knife edge living, that first week
'Ordinary' had taken a holiday
We embraced the deeply meaningful,
 pursued the brilliantly poignant,
 laughed at the clever and funny,
 immersed ourselves in relentless positivity,
 scoffed at the nay sayers
 saw new ways clearly and loved Jacinda
 dearly

Then came the time when I said 'Enough!' I want 'ordinary' to come
back from holiday.
I miss her!

16 April 2020

Notes: *There was a point during level 4 when it was just
overwhelming – too much news, too much passion, too much
expression, too much opinion, too much, too much. The pull of quiet
and home was needed to restore the equilibrium.*

Margaret Garland

Covid Greetings

Shaking hands – a ritual of the world.
Sharing the peace – a deeply meaningful act of love and care.
Loving hugs – expressions of delight and welcome.

Gone – all gone.

Empty, so empty. What to do?

Before lockdown we tried:
 bumping elbows – awkward giggling
 s'up? – not everyone's cup of tea
 toe touching – yeah no to the one leg wobbles
 prayer hands – better

During lockdown – 2 metre 'giddays!'

Then I learned to look, to listen, to express

We saw the yearning for each other in the eyes that spoke love from a distance
The faces that were beloved were still beloved
We heard the words carefully shaped to express what a hug could not
Barriers went down as we sought to act out our love and care in other ways

Reminding us that there are many ways to express that God is our peace, we are God's peace to each other.

Kia tau tonu te rangimarie o te Ariki ki a koutou.
Peace be with you my friends.

8 April 2020

Notes: I was out walking, contemplating social distancing in church and how we are being asked to stop hugging, sharing the peace by shaking hands. We had to stop and think what we are actually saying and how we could say it in a new yet meaningful way.

Margaret Garland

Halo or Hell: The language of love (not)

I feel frustrated, angry, disappointed.

How easily we employ the language of extremes. You are perfect until you are not perfect.

You can do no wrong until you can do no right. Halo or Hell – take your pick.

Nuances are swept aside,
uncertainties and ‘don’t knows’ are swooped upon as weakness,
stumbles and mistakes become unforgiveable sins.

The detractors are waiting to pounce - on the smallest mistake,
the self-obsessed are unable to see - beyond their needs,
some politicians are not able to put aside point scoring, being
know-it-alls.

the finger pointers have been so busy their hands are
cramping.

Dear God, teach us the language of love we pray. Help us to change our words to include the subtleties of best intention, the learning from listening to more than our own voice or viewpoint, the compassion that comes from shared troubles, the nuances of living in a pandemic response.

Teach us the language of love, we pray: to speak with patience, tolerance, kindness, carefully choosing our words to heal not harm; to bolster, not blame; to construct not demolish; to acknowledge we are all in this together with all its unknowns and uncertainties, knowing only that it is in love for one another we will change the very foundations of this world. Amen.

Late April 2020

Notes: Written towards the end of level 4, this piece arises out of my difficulty with the blame game, the myriad of opinions on who and what was right or wrong that arose out of the lockdown. The language was often an ill-considered rant, the words lacking in finesse, the opinions small minded and self-righteous, the focus shallow and narrow. I came across so many examples of how the media, the politicians, the opinionated and self-serving, the ordinary people choose personal attacks and judgements, sensational headlines over facts and trying to find answers. For me, living with uncertainties requires compassion and love – because:

We none of us know every answer. Sometimes you have to sit with the questions for a while. We get things wrong even with the best of intentions. It is ok to say oops and try again. Hindsight is useful for next

time rather than a stick of blame for this. Our right to individual freedom does not surpass the needs of our community. How easy to pull down from the sidelines. We haven't done this before so cut us some slack, why don't you?

And, p.s, life wasn't perfect before it either.

Nitpicking, point scoring, was never far below the surface from those we might have expected better from. We can do better than this. And we did – at times.....

Margaret Garland

Social Isolation

You were socially isolated Thomas!
More, you were at odds with your community of faith.
You did not believe as they believed.
Matthew called it 'credal dissonance':

Yet you stayed within.
How hard is that? To not be understood or to fully understand, yet remaining.

Jesus had a fair idea of that first concept.
'Do you not understand?' he cried.
'Believe, and you will understand' he preached.
Yet he stayed.

We have a fair idea of the second concept.
'We do not understand what you mean for us to do God.'
We believe, while doubt hovers waiting for an 'in'.
Yet we stay.

We choose to remain!
 Thomas hung about and finally was able to say 'My Lord and my God.'
 We stay in the midst of confusion and know the hand of God on us.

Jesus chose to remain.....for the ignominy of the cross.
'Father, your will be done' he prayed.

And so it was!

For it is through Christ's wounds we finally get it.
 we truly touch the power of love
 we understand why we choose to endure
 we with Thomas can say with utter certainty 'My Lord and my God.'

19 April 2020

Notes: *Written after participating in a service from Knox Church Christchurch with Rev Dr. Matthew Jack on John 20: 24-31: the story of*

Thomas waiting for proof. I pondered the fact that many of us stay within the church even though we differ in our understandings.

Margaret Garland

*Tui's
Psalms & Other Writings*

A Psalm of Viruses and Futures

Eternal God,
You have seen it all before
but for us, these are
the strangest times.

A tiny virus with a royal name
is wrecking havoc on our world ~
people dying
borders closing
markets free falling
people panic buying
countless events cancelled
cities and countries in lockdown
the future of everything suddenly uncertain

How can we plan for our lives ~
to meet as a community of faith
to go about our daily work
to celebrate a wedding
to trust in the future?

Now God, I like a workable plan ~
plans makes me feel safe,
that I have some control,
but these strange times
remind me how little I have,
how much my future
is tied to everyone else.

God of all times, God of all futures
help us cope with these strange times
help me cope with these strange times ~
how to live with uncertainty
how to be more flexible
how to care for the neighbour
to know where to put our trust.

God of all times, God of all futures
help us put our trust in you

Amen.

11 March 2020 - the morning after Mark came home from a meeting on COVID-19 and said "I'm feeling unwell from COVID-19 overdose". Meanwhile, Helen is trying to plan a wedding on 18th April and I felt like life as I knew it was starting to unravel at the seams and there wasn't a lot I could do about it.

Tui Bevin

Love

An understanding based on 1 Corinthians 13:3-13

Love is eternal
and without it, we have nothing.

Love is patient and kind
and without envy, arrogance and rudeness.

Love is generous
and rejoices in joyfulness and truth

Love is always hopeful
and it trusts and perseveres

Love, hope and faith live on
and the greatest of these is love.

*22 March 2020 ~ Helen and Kevin's wedding day.
Helen has played at lots of weddings so the 1 Corinthians 13
passage about love sounds cliché to her. I thought I'd try and write
a simple reinterpretation of it to read at her wedding. They foresaw
that a wedding with 90 or so on their planned date of 18th April
wouldn't be possible so brought it forward to what turned out to be
4 days before lockdown, March 22nd. There were 11 of us (including
Helen & Kevin) at their "Plan B" wedding at Opoho Presbyterian
Church, all immediate family.*

Tui Bevin

A Psalm for This Time

God of time and all time
God of this time and every time

We are living through unprecedented times
where everything takes on new meanings
where time is changing futures.
These strange times are scary.

For the first time ever
our borders were closed to all but Kiwis and their families
at the precise time of 11.59 pm last evening.
Loving God, please help those affected by border closures
Loving God, please help those who risk their lives to get over
borders

But all this talk of borders is bringing back memories
in my friend, who 75 years ago,
found herself on the wrong side of borders
and became a refugee for the third time
trudging through snow in the dark of night
not knowing if they were headed the right way.
Loving God, please help my friend through this time.
Loving God, please help us all through this time.

People who've entered New Zealand
have to self-isolate for two weeks
and once they're out of that time
like the rest of us they have to stay
two metres away from others.
We've been told to wash our hands for twenty seconds
It doesn't sound that long, until I'm told
that's long enough to sing *Happy Birthday* ~ twice.
Loving God, help me slow down
so I can take the time to sing *Happy Birthday* twice
not just one time, but many times every day
this week, next week, next month, the month after that
and for as long as it takes.

Loving God, how much time will have to pass
before we can meet for worship,
before we can greet each other with a hongi or handshake

before I can wash my hands for my usual time
before life returns to some sort of normal?
I want to know, but perhaps it's better I don't.

God of all time
God of these strange times
we need your help

help us, we pray, to make the most of this time
help us, we pray, to slow down and sing *Happy Birthday* twice
help us, we pray, to focus on the things that we can do
help us, we pray, to let go of the things we can do nothing about

God of these strangest of times
be with us and those we love and those we do not
this day and forever more.

Amen

20 March 2020 ~ There was a lot going around inside my head as the pandemic took hold of the world and it felt like things were going to get a lot worse before they got better. This psalm was an attempt to contain it all.

Tui Bevin

Deliverance

Lockdown came and we stayed in our bubbles
so the germs wouldn't spread and cause lots of trouble.
There was no school and we couldn't go to church
and our daily walks were a teddy bear search.

We all joined together to beat coronavirus
We had to make sure that it didn't stifle us
We tried to be kind and we met over Zoom
so our lives wouldn't end in a cytokine storm.

We lunched with Ashley and also the PM
who told us the numbers and what to do when,
to keep social distance and strict isolation
till the day could come for The Great Reunification!

15 April 2020 ~ This poem grew from the first stanza that I wrote for James's birthday book when I needed a way to explain lockdown in 4-year-old terms. It was fun to expand it in the middle of a deadly serious pandemic lockdown. During levels 4 & 3 I imagined the beginning of level 2 when family and friends could get together as The Great Reunification – and it was for us.

Tui Bevin

Living Over

I was there and hugged the mother-to-be
when only I could tell she was pregnant...

I was there and hugged the mother-to-be
when her boy child whooshed into the world...

I was there and hugged the boy child
when he cried and needed settling in his grandmother's arms...

I was there and hugged the boy child
when he was baptised James Henrik...

I was there and hugged James Henrik
when we celebrated his first birthday, and his second...

I was there and hugged James Henrik
when he went to ED with croup at midnight...

I was there and hugged James Henrik
when we celebrated his third birthday...

I was there but couldn't hug James Henrik
when he opened his fourth birthday presents
sitting over two metres away, on the driveway,
in the cold, behind the locked gate.

I will be there when lockdown is over
I will open the gate, and
I will hug James Henrik again, and again.

15 April 2020. A Mormor's (grandmother's) lament for her grandson, James Henrik, on his 4th birthday, today, Day 21 of Level 4 lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tui Bevin

Mandata

This year it was forbidden
to gather together
as we like to do,
with our younger and older
and those in between.

We couldn't pause
in our journeys to the cross together,
we couldn't break bread together
in the upstairs room
while daytime dissolved into dark.

But we were not forbidden
to pause in our own bubbles
to light a candle
to break freshly baked bread
to dip it in 'wine'
to commit again
to that ever-new commandment
that we love one another.

No kingly virus
no matter how catchy
no matter how cataclysmic
could ever trump
the commandment to love
that Jesus shared
at that last but first table.

20 May 2020 ~ recalling Maundy Thursday 2020 in the time of national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Maundy Thursday service at Opoho Church where we squash around a long table in the Morrison Lounge has become very special to me in recent years. We participate as a three generational family, with our young grandchildren welcomed and included. I have written psalm poems about these services twice before.

Mandata is Latin for commands.

Tui Bevin

A Psalm of 24/6

In the beginning, we are told,
You created the world,
and over the next six days,
You made day and night
water, dry land and vegetation
the sun, moon and all living creatures
and people and life.
You said that it was good
and after all that effort,
You blessed the seventh day
set it apart, and rested.

Then, in case we missed the point,
You spoke to Moses who told the people
who then passed it along, one to another
until it was written down
so we can read it in this time and place:
that we remember the Sabbath day
and keep it holy.

Our protestant settler forebears
abstained from work, travel
and pleasure-seeking on the Sabbath,
and passed the 1884 Police Offences Act
to forbid most Sunday trading,
but
one hundred years later in 1989
Sunday trading became legal
and school, sport and busyness
soon claimed Sunday too.

Do we need this 24/7 world
or do we need to reclaim the Sabbath,
keeping the day set apart
and holy, for us to rest?

There really is no question,
is there, God?

12 June 2020 ~ I'm intrigued by how many people have wistfully told me they miss the peace of lockdown now that our options, expectations and pace of life have sped up again. People's descriptions of life in their lockdown bubbles often sound like they're remembering a time completely different to any other time they've known before ~ one that gave them a glimpse of another way of living. It sounds like lockdown was a time set apart: an enforced retreat or a long Sabbath.

We come from a lineage in which keeping a Sabbath or Sunday was important, if not mandated, but it fell (or was it pushed?) overboard in the rush to our postmodern, hyperconnected, 24/7 world.

I like the idea of a weekly rhythm with a regular Sunday, or part of a Sunday, away from my normal routines and busyness. After church in the morning I like to limit where I go, who I see and what I do. I avoid shopping and most housework if I can. Mark tries to avoid or minimize the use of noisy outdoor tools. I like to have something special for afternoon tea and linger over it, and a very easy dinner. And I like to switch off from the world and go to bed early with a book and cuppa at day's end. It helps me have Sabbath rest if I live with a Sabbath mindset and plan to confine most of my busyness to 24/6. Sabbath time waits for us to receive it. It is a gift.

Tui Bevin

