***Are we there yet?*** from the Tragedy and Congregations team,

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We have been offering small group information and discussion sessions for people in ministry under the title of *Trauma-informed ministry for times like these.* What we notice is that folks are worn out and wanting this to be over, despite knowing that we are in this for the long haul and that that might be a very long time. The weariness is accompanied and sometimes offset by excitement about the opportunities ahead in a changed landscape. Yesterday I was asked *How long will we be in this disillusionment phase?* with obvious longing for it to be over. (You may want to look back at our *Mapping the journey through uncharted Covid-19 territory* blog.)

Well, it won’t be over until it is over. We can’t change that. And that’s not a bad thing.

Being up close and personal with the disillusionment phase this summer has led me to believe that interesting and very important things are happening during it. People are recouping their energies after the heroic output that was called forth in lockdown. The disillusionment phase is a time of depleted energy, which will hopefully lead us to rest more. At the same time there is a settling into the facts of what has happened and its impact on us personally, as a church congregation and as British people and world citizens. When a traumatising event occurs, there is a rupture in time. We have the experience but don’t really understand its impact at first. Whilst being heroic, we are carried on a wave of adrenalin to respond. When that crashes – as it must – the full impact of events begin to register. Not only are we disillusioned, but we may be de-illusioned, stripped of ways of thinking that no longer work in this new world we’ve entered. Fundamental assumptions about the safety and benevolence of the world, of other people and of ourselves are shaken and shattered. These nonconscious assumptions have enabled us to live and plan in a relatively stable world. Now they are gone. And the work of rebuilding and reshaping them is a long and arduous task that begins in the disillusionment phase.

Through all the phases after and during a collective trauma, we are surviving and adapting. Human beings are constantly creating new neural pathways in the brain as we meet challenges and obstacles and learn new ways of doing things. We are born learners and we create those new pathways until we die. By now many of us have begun to master the art of holding two opposite things in our head: we will begin in person worship on \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) and maybe we won’t (if the infection rate soars). We are learning to live with unpredictability. It remains hard work for our brains and is exhausting but we are doing it.

In the disillusionment phase we are also experiencing sparks and seeds of new possibilities. Whilst looking for ground firm enough to stand upon, we are innovating. That is exciting (and may come with its own exhaustion). These sparks and seeds enable us to survive and adapt and through them we might find our way to a new normal in months and years to come.

Finally, we continue to name and grieve the losses. This is tricky as we wrote about in *Lament and the Pandemic* a few months ago. It is tricky because it forces us to face those losses and we prefer to look away and skip over them. And it requires we actually grieve them, when we in the Western church have lost the capacity to lament and prefer the excitement and positivity of the new things. A kind of toxic positivity will seize some in a desire to avoid negative emotion, fearing that expressing it will bring us down. But the opposite is true. Have a go at writing a lament, as advised in that earlier blog, and you’ll discover that it shifts things within us and releases energy for the future. Walter Brueggemann, who features in our last blog *Living in Apocalyptic Times: Reality, Grief, Hope*, talks about how grieving the losses enables us to grasp the new normal as we find our way into it.

It is this business of naming loss that may keep us in this phase for some time. We simply do not have a sense of what losses are ahead, although we know they are looming. Not only is the infection rate rising and there is the possibility of local lockdowns, but the impact on the economy of this pandemic has not fully hit. And then there is climate change and Brexit (… I need a lie down, or a stiff cuppa).

It is no surprise that the characteristics of the disillusionment phase are exhaustion, low energy, tension and conflict, and utter unpredictability and variability of emotions. There is a lot going on! But it is worth hanging in there so that the important, soil-turning work that happens in this phase can be done and done well. We listen prayerfully and discerningly to our people, encouraging honesty about how this really feels, and holding both sadness for the losses and excitement for new possibilities in tender hands. We also take good care of ourselves. This work is costly; we must steward our energies as we will be in this for the long haul and we want to lead well.

Are we there yet? Hardly. But we are definitely on our way. And we also have what we need: a faithful God who refuses to let go of us and who walks with us through the valley and into the sunlight of a new day.

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