



“The Holy Spirit is that power which opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality.”
John V Taylor

Prayer
Mothering God,
grace us with your Spirit
that we may not be
comfortless. Amen

“I will not leave you orphaned” John 14.18

One of the most harrowing of biblical verses is Jeremiah’s depiction of the matriarch Rachel weeping inconsolably for the loss of her ‘children’ killed by the Babylonians: “She refuses to be comforted” (31.15). It is bleak indeed not to be able to access comfort in times of loss and trauma.

The German artist Käthe Kollwitz knew about this bleakness. She experienced deep and prolonged depression after losing a son on the battlefields of WWI. In this drawing she shows us the depth of the bond between a mother and child and makes clear how shattering separation would be. The two figures are locked together, the woman’s sturdy arms and hands enfolding her little one with infinite tenderness. We know that if we were that baby, we would feel utterly safe.

When Jesus breaks the news to his disciples that he must leave them, he says, “I will not leave you orphaned”. Rather, knowing that they will feel as bereft as a parentless child, he will send them another ‘*paráklētos*’ to be with them for ever. Initially, this Greek word was a legal one and is often translated ‘advocate’

but it had also come to have the wider meaning of one who stands alongside, supporting, comforting. Parenting the disciples in Jesus’ stead, the Holy Spirit was to offer both protection and tenderness.

What do we see as we gaze at this drawing in the context of coronavirus?

We may think of those separated from parents or children by lockdown. Or those for whom the virus has brought separation by death, the current rawness of whose loss makes comfort impossible.

But we may also see in the drawing the God who says: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you” (Is 66.13a), waiting to pick us up and cradle us as soon as we are ready.

And in those strong, shielding arms, the ‘comforter’ Jesus promised to send.