The days are beginning to merge now. Wednesday merging into Friday. And the natural rhythm of the days of week now seems to be lightening their grip. The almost surreal news of the loss of life, the steep rise in the number of new cases, hospitals emerging in conference centers and the extraordinary bravery of all those working on the front line. Those working in the NHS, in the supermarkets, the pharmacies, those continuing to provide vital services, the collection of bins, driving the lorries delivering food. What was apparently normal six weeks ago now looks and feels like another world we once lived in. The speed of change has perhaps been the most unnerving and the reality that the tiniest of beings has brought the human world to a standstill.

The churches, the synagogues, the mosques, the temples, the meeting houses all closed. Yes there is a supreme effort underway to put services and prayers online, to maintain some sense of normality, of order perhaps, to be a visible presence amidst the shifting reality.

Two thousand years ago around this time of year the city of Jerusalem was preparing to celebrate the passover. This year passover is on April 8 and it always falls around now. Although Judea and Jerusalem were under Roman occupation, the governing Romans took the view that it was better to leave the religious life and rites of their conquered peoples alone. That it would ferment consistent revolt and unrest should the religious aspects of the conquered societies be challenged. So for the most part the religious life of Jerusalem carried on as normal and the jewish temple really operated under license from the governing Romans. There were for sure the usual ups and downs but things ticked along until a man entered the city riding a donkey. People laid palms in the street and some of them shouted hosanna blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. This was the man who said ‘ blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.’ This was the man who said ‘ Love your neighbour as yourself ‘and that the wildflowers were dressed more finely than any emperor.’

The story ends or indeed begins next week. But all along this man, the man on the donkey had challenged and to be fair undermined the prevailing construction of ‘ normal.’ The construction of reality overseen and licensed by both the Roman empire the Jewish religious authorities of the day.

The coronavirus is harmless to its host which most scientists believe are bats. However some chickens were infected by the bats and were taken to a wet market which is a live market for animals and fish in China and were sold. From here the virus spread. Other viruses, Ebola, Sars, Mers and Hiv are harmless within their host animals but once they cross the species boundary then as we can now see things can unravel very very quickly. But who crossed the boundary? Not so long ago one hundred and seventy eight human beings died of Creutzfeld Jakob disease otherwise known as mad cow disease. Four point four million cows were slaughtered. This disease came about because cattle were fed processed sheep protein. You would have thought someone would have raised deep concerns about herbivores being fed animal protein. But we seem to have carried on regardless. Regardless.

Who is the moral guardian of the environment? Who is the moral guardian of the health of the planet? Is it the government? Is it the church, the mosque, the temple? Who recognises natural boundaries? Who upholds natural law? Within the Jewish tradition is the Torah, the law of the Jewish faith and contained within it are many instructions of what and what not to eat. How and how not to eat it. That here is a recognition that we are dependent on the environment and that right relationship is essential to life, to thriving and dancing. But it is so easy just to carry on regardless, to let the system carry the weight and in the frenzy not ask the questions that really need asking. And so from here you end up with a one eyed version of normality. The man on the donkey challenges all of this, holds up a reflection of normal and asks ‘ is this love? Is this justice? Is this compassion? Is this harmony?

Right now we can not ‘ carry on as normal’ We can move a few things on line, but to a certain degree a ‘ great silence’ has descended, the skies are quiet, the buses and trains run but they are empty and the wonderful artist Jerry Shearing described the A27 as looking like ‘an abandoned snake skin.’

One thing is becoming very clear. We have surely built this house on sand. What would it look like our society if we were to build again, to take the good timbers from the past and build with the knowledge of a new moral template, one which honours the coral reefs, the climate, every raindrop, all peoples. It is the job of each generation to reimagine to refocus, to correct the mistakes of the past without blame or rancour, with at best a deepening love.