

18th January 2020

Dear Friends

I am writing this on the day that has become known as blue Monday because it is the day that many people often feel as if they have the post-Christmas blues and that life has become like treacle with nothing to look forward to. With that in mind I turned to the words of my friend Andrea Skevington. Andrea Skevington is a writer who lives near one of my favourite stretches of coastline in Suffolk. She writes stories, including retelling biblical stories and also publishes her poetry and reflections on life on her website. I commend them to you.

[Poem: Inside, Outside. Lockdown III | Andrea Skevington](#)

With her permission, I am printing her entry for the 6th of January 2021. It spoke to me of hope and the opportunity to plant seeds in our own life that will germinate and be fruitful in the coming year.

Your friend and pastor

Mark

Poem – Dreaming of Flowers, Lockdown III JANUARY 6, 2021 / ANDREASKEVINGTON

Here in England, we are back in lockdown – I think it's Lockdown III, depending on how you count the November one. It's exhausting, and so difficult for so many, with all the chopping and changing. It's dreadful to watch the numbers of sick and dying rising every day, and to hear of the hardships lockdown brings too. It's relentless. I am so grateful to the science and health professionals who are working so hard to both tend the sick and find ways of overcoming the virus. I am so grateful for the promise of the vaccines. I only hope we can get them delivered quickly and effectively.

In the first lockdown, I wrote snatches of poems which often started from times of quiet, seeking stillness in the garden. You can read about that here. How much of that I'll do at this time of year I don't know. What this lockdown will bring we can't say. But I find myself drawn again to the gentle changes of weather and season, plants and flowers, as a way of steadying myself, and marking the passage of time, and connecting with something beyond myself which gives glimpses of hope.

In the November lockdown, or circuit-break, I'm not quite sure what name to give it, I indulged the gardener's delight of ordering and planting bulbs for the spring and began dreaming of flowers – I found myself waking with planting schemes forming in my mind. I needed something to look for beyond the shortening of the days, the closing in of the weather, and the uncertainty surrounding Christmas. I found it was effective. It was something within my control, something I could do to introduce an element of hope and change and the promise of beauty. It gave me physical work, too, which in turn helps with sleep.

And yesterday, the notebook came out, and tentative jottings began to emerge. So I don't know whether this will become a regular practice, but, as in the first lockdown, I thought I'd share with you whatever it is that comes up, and see if that connects with you, who are kind enough to share your time and attention with me here. I hope we can peep outside and see something that lifts us. I hope we can receive the gifts this dark season gives, and perhaps bring a few sprigs of green inside. We can plant hope, even here.

So, this poem, which might be the first of a new series of Lockdown poems, draws on the earlier planted hope, and receives encouragement and delight from seeing new things spring up. I also wonder – what this time? What might I do during this lockdown? Of course, there is no necessity for there to be anything, it is enough to live in these strange days, but I am wondering what there might be that is within my scope and power to do, to begin, to dream of....

Dreaming of flowers Lockdown III

Each morning, now,
as the sun nudges fitfully up,
I do my rounds of the garden,

Sometimes under a wide umbrella,
walking with as much grace
as I can muster,

careful not to trample the
sodden, spongy ground.

I am looking for fingers of crocus,
ready to spread,
and snowdrops, grey-green
in the dark soil.

I am looking for what I planted,
and for what has inched
in patient drifts through
the waiting ground.

And there, and there,
I begin to see.
Each day, I hope,
a few more,
and a little taller.

On better nights,
I dream of flowers now,
and wake to think of flowers.
Red and purple
and orange, spread
like velvet, loud with bees.
The hard knots of bulbs
I planted in fistfuls
by November's shrinking light –
in a fury of hope,
in defiance of the
narrowing circle

of my life, of our lives –
they will awaken.

They are beginning
to do their work now,
this time, within me,
locked down once more,
they are beginning
to push up from the
cold dark depths,
beginning to green
in this faintest, tentative,
stretching of the light.

And what this time?
What will I do that
could push through
the darkness with
green spears of hope,
could fill my dreams
with the scent of life?