



ELY CATHEDRAL

# Weekly Reflection

by Canon Jessica Martin

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**'Hold fast to what is good'**, wrote St Paul.

I have been distractedly gobbling up news – from the newsfeed on my 'phone, supplemented by visits to the BBC website. I don't exactly mean to, and I don't even always notice myself clicking on to it. It's become a habit just below conscious level. And, of course, an awful lot has been going on.

It's important to know what's happening in the world. It's part of being a citizen. But I think the way I consume news isn't quite like that. It starts that way, but something quite different keeps it going. The emotions are all stressful ones – anxiety, fear, outrage, astonishment, sorrow, shock, disgust - or just an endlessly unsatisfied, endlessly stimulated curiosity. And even though it's anxious and uncomfortable to be constantly jolted into these extreme feelings, it's strangely addictive. Not surprising, really. After all, the news isn't going to be written in order to help you *stop* reading.

Just at the moment, a lot of the news seems to be about whether the news itself is true. Whether it's conspiracy theories about the US election, gossip about Governmental infighting, or news about vaccines, the truth-value of what we read is presented as contested, often by significantly large groups of people. It's harder than I ever remember it being to feel steady about what's real and what isn't. *The nations are in uproar and the kingdoms are shaken*, writes the psalmist in this morning's psalm, psalm 46.

And it's all happening while our bodies sit at home watching the drama playing out amongst groups of people we have never met and are never likely to. And we can't go out, or do anything with real people in real space to counter the confusing layers of information assault we are getting from the screens which bring the world to us at the moment. It's a trapped, helpless feeling.

So I have been thinking about the number of times that St Paul, in various letters to various communities, told them to **'hold fast to what is good'**. In fact, when he wrote to the community at Philippi he expanded on that. He wrote, **'Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.'**

St Paul knew about the addictive effects of news and novelty. He called it having **'itching ears'** – a horribly vivid image! He also knew that our minds sicken if they are constantly dealing with toxic stimulus. We need a store of the true, the just and the kind within ourselves if we are to be true, just, and kind in our work in the world.

The good which is under our hands to do will always be better than spectating the rage of the nations. The turning of our hearts towards goodness – the direct actions of love - will give us strength for testing times, whereas our trapped onscreen gaze can only paralyse.

**Hold fast to what is good.** God is in the midst of us: the foundations will not shake.