

FOCUS ON FAITH

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FOLLOWING THE MAKER'S INSTRUCTIONS

Little did I realise when I was composing last month's "Focus on Faith" how events would unwind as they have done over the past couple of weeks. For those who didn't read the article I commented on how many of our long established "institutions" – monarchy; parliament; marriage and family life; education; the Church; media and law and order – had been under attack. And then we had the riots!

Like many I've spoken to, it really saddened me to see the wanton destruction of property and the way in which so many young people and even children rioted and looted businesses in their communities. Of course we have to ask the question, "why did this happen?" and to figure out the root causes – which are likely to be various and deep seated. Hearing two teenage girls who took part in the Croydon riots boasting that they were showing the "police and the rich that we can do what we want" seems to add weight to the argument that our "moral compass" has gone astray. We need to get back to our original Maker's instructions!

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Whatever the rights and wrongs of the catalyst for the rioting – the shooting of a man in Tottenham – to see how quickly the situation escalated, not just in other areas of London but in major cities across England, gives cause for concern. Much has been made of the way "social media" technology has contributed to the "copycat" nature of the subsequent unrest and perhaps that's one of the biggest issues we have to tackle. It seems to me that some young people would prefer to have as role models anonymous, faceless people with whom they have no real connection, rather than those who should be closest to them – parents and their wider family network. Gang culture only thrives when family ties are sidelined and where the need to be loved and accepted has been neglected.

Maybe one of the key lessons is that family relationships are now so fragmented that it will be difficult to mend society as we previously knew it. We can blame the breakdown of marriage and family life and the fatherless generation; inadequate social housing; under-resourced education provision; the insufficient employment opportunities; lack of discipline and a host of other issues. But the loss of the traditional moral and social principles and values that underpin our culture means that ultimately individually and collectively we lose our sense of direction, purpose and accountability.

When we worship at the altar of a personality and celebrity culture that places value on materialism and where success in life is judged by those who have the biggest and best, we allow hedonism to rear its ugly head.

And we shouldn't forget that a number of people have lost their lives or have been seriously injured as a result of these often mindless acts of violence and robbery. The perpetrators have to face the due process of law, but we also have to avoid the "knee jerk reaction" that often follows civil unrest and tragedy. In excess of 1,700 people have been arrested and charged and those "moments of madness" are likely to blight their lives forever.

However all is not bad news – a number of positives have come out of seeming tragedy:

- The army of broom-carrying local residents working together to literally pick up the pieces – a positive example of the way social media can bring people together
- The spontaneous "Love our Community"; Post-it note "walls of love" and positive graffiti campaigns
- The commendable courage of some parents who took responsibility for their children's actions and accompanied them to police stations to confess and face the consequences
- The way some of the victims and those affected have offered words of forgiveness and appealed for calm
- Thankfully it was the actions of a few – the vast majority of people are still law-abiding, peace-loving responsible citizens

And often the Church has been involved in local community activities. In many areas there have been soup kitchens; offers of accommodation; Street Pastors helping the Police provide security and many other acts of kindness.

The Bible warns that "**people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God**" (2Timothy 3:2-4).

Jesus said the two most important commandments are to "**Love God**" and "**Love others as much as we love ourselves**".

We get the best results when we start following the Maker's instructions!

To find out more about the Christian faith and resources available plus information on services at local Churches together with contact details, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.