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A Candle in the Window

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Words to encourage us in tough times.

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**A wonderful tribute to the National Health Service in the UK:**

Two weeks ago I mentioned in the reflection the writer Michael Rosen's great new book about his experience with very serious Covid 19. Michael was 48 days on a ventilator in 2020. Above his bed in hospital the staff pinned a copy of the poem he had written (before Covid arrived in the world) in honour of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NHS. His poem speaks to us all. We remember with thankfulness all who work in hospitals everywhere in our world. And perhaps especially the millions of 'hidden' carers in the poorest countries who are with Covid patients in situations of extreme poverty. The difficulties they are facing are to us unimaginable. Everywhere around, death without medical aid. Hold them in your heart.

*These are the hands that touch us first*

*Feel your head - find the pulse - and make your bed.*

*These are the hands that tap your back*

*Test the skin - hold your arm - wheel the bin.*

*Change the bulb - fix the drip Pour the jug - replace your hip.*

*These are the hands that fill the bath*

*Mop the floor - flick the switch - soothe the sore.*

*Burn the swabs - give us a jab*

*Throw out sharps - design the lab.*

*And these are the hands that stop the leaks*

*Empty the pan - wipe the pipes - carry the can.*

*Clamp the veins - make the cast*

*Log the dose - and touch us last.*

Michael Rosen: Many Different Kinds of Love – A Story of Life, Death and the NHS - published by Ebury Press of Penguin Random House 2021. ISBN 978-1-52910-945-0

**The Night Sky:**

Severe light pollution in Britain appears to have fallen according to the countryside charity CPRE. Across a week in February, the charity asked volunteers to look up and count the stars they could see. The results suggest that 51% of participants were experiencing severe light pollution, compared to 61% the previous year – an effect, the charity concluded, of darker towns and city centres, owing to lockdown. Sadly, though, the overall trend is worrying: human illumination of the planet is growing by 2% a year. This has serious consequences:

there is mounting evidence that light pollution is a serious contributing factor to what has been called the 'insect apocalypse'. Disorientated by light, birds also die as they migrate over cities: a distressing 100,000 a year succumb over New York City, confused by the illumination of the skyscrapers. The solution is simple and obvious: to turn unnecessary lights off – also saving energy – and to shade those required at street level.

Light pollution also has the effect of deracinating humans in densely populated areas from what was once a vivid, intense, and often deeply generative relationship with the night sky. In Ancient Babylonia, astronomy was inextricably linked with the development of branches of mathematics, with cosmology and divination, and with the establishment of calendars. Early Greek philosophers and mathematicians were also concerned with the arrangement of heavenly bodies, borrowing heavily from their eastern forebears to try to understand the universe and the human place within it. Stars, of course, have been used since time immemorial to help human beings move around the planet: Polynesians uses a range of methods, including star navigation, to travel prodigious distances across the Pacific.

A watcher of the skies reaches beyond the everyday into awe – or comfort. CS Lewis compared Dante's conception of the cosmos, as he was led through it on his journey in the Divine Comedy, to being 'conducted through an immense cathedral' as opposed to the post-Enlightenment vision of the night sky in which we feel we 'lost in a shoreless sea'. But whatever we feel when we look up at night, we instinctively feel that that we are in the presence of something magnificent, something greater than the mere humdrum. We, just like all creatures on Earth, desperately need our dark skies. (from The Guardian, UK)

### **The 2020 Reith Lectures:**

The famous Reith lectures on the BBC were given in 2020 by Dr Mark Carney former head of the Canadian Central Bank and in recent years Governor of the Bank of England. Mark Carney who now works globally on climate change, is one of the visionary thinkers of our time, as evidenced in these lectures and in his recent book - Values: Building a Better World, published by William Collins UK. It is easy to get his lectures on You Tube and they are well worth listening to as they address in a particular way many of the tough issues facing our capitalist-dominated world in which multiple millions of our sisters and brothers are moving day by day into even greater poverty. Carney sees addressing climate issues as central.

### **A vision grounded in reality:**

***The marvellous vision of the peaceable Kingdom, in which all violence has been overcome and all children women and men live in loving unity with nature, calls for its realisation in our day-to-day lives. Instead of being an escapist dream, it challenges us to anticipate what it promises. Every time we show compassion, care for the Earth, seek justice for all, we are making the vision come true. We must remind one another constantly of the vision. Whenever it comes alive in us we find new energy to live it out, right where we are. With the vision within us we can never escape from real life. (Adapted from a reflection by the late Henri Nouwen, activist, visionary and popular writer whose books I recommend.)***