

## Here we go again!



As I heard the announcement that Lockdown was back, the above title came straight to mind. But later, as the words went through my head, other words imposed themselves: the chorus of the song, *Jolly Good Company*:

*Here we are again  
happy as can be,  
all good pals and jolly good company.*

*Raymond Wallace 1931*

I'm pretty sure this was one of the songs sung by the music hall group, the Novocastrians, of which my paternal grandfather was part, ordinary working people who rehearsed and performed in their scant spare time, taking their show around Newcastle Working Men's Clubs. My grandfather accompanied the singing on piano and was one half of a comedy duo, he, dressed suavely complete with top hat and with silver-topped cane and his 'stooge' shabbily dressed – my grandmother prized a photograph of them in costume. Though all this ended in my early childhood, I can remember he and my father occasionally breaking into songs from the repertoire.

This one is an interesting little song, written during a time of hardship, sardonic in tone and quite relevant today even when few actually feel like singing, were it allowed, as we enter a second lockdown.

As ever, we have a choice. We either turn in on ourselves, moan and make ourselves and others miserable, or we make the most of what we *can* do.

But, you may say, what about our 'jolly good pals', those dear to us we will be prevented from meeting? We still have many means of communicating with others, far more than people had when this song was written, or than when families were separated in World Wars One and Two depending only on scarce cards or letters. Even if we don't do Zoom or Skype and all the rest, we can phone family and friends for a chat. We could even – radical thought! – write a letter! Nothing to say? Come on – we can always think of something, a funny story, something we've noticed as we've looked out or gone for a walk. Trivia can be the beginning of a good conversation.

Communication matters because to cope, we need each other, just as the Music Hall group needed the rest of the cast to be effective – and needed to be willing to expend time and energy to bring some light to others.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” said St. Paul (**Galatians 6:2**) as he urged the Galatians to keep going in faith. That’s a verse worth learning and pondering. Bearing one another’s burdens doesn’t mean stripping the supermarket shelves of things we ‘might’ need. It means looking out for the other, waving a greeting, smiling if you’re outside and maskless, keeping others in your thoughts and above all, praying, hard, for others and for the world. And, however we can, being jolly good company!



Also in Galatians – **Galatians 5:22-26** – is Paul’s admonition to live guided by the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control.” It seems to me that these are qualities massively needed at this moment, perhaps now more than ever.

A Prayer:

Eternal God our Father, you are love and life.

In your Son Jesus you have shown us how to live a love-motivated life, responsive to the needs of others while we also take care of ourselves.

Knowing that you call upon us to pray for and help your kingdom of peace and justice to come, we bring our concerns for the world.

We bring those who live lives starved of **love**: children who are neglected, adults trapped into loveless relationships, all who are abused, often in the false name of ‘caring.’

We bring those who find life joyless, often driving others from them by their own attitude, and those for whom life is joyless because it is so unremittingly harsh.

We pray a gentle light, a tender laughter, your healing love, a surprise of **joy**.

We bring the earth, in need of **peace**. Peace from terror, war and struggle. From pandemic. Peace for creation itself, over-used, exhausted.

As we approach Remembrance Sunday, we are even more aware of the cost of war and, though we cannot see how it can come to be, earnestly we pray for true peace.

We bring with thanksgiving the quality that is **kindness**. The big acts of kindness that surprise us and the ordinary kindnesses offered freely to one another. Help us, Lord, to be kind.

We bring with thanksgiving those who demonstrate **goodness, generosity** of heart. Those who, having little, yet give much. Those who have been blessed with much and share what they have. We pray, at this troubled time, a generosity of heart for all.

We bring with thanksgiving those who encourage us by their **faithfulness** in you, and we bring those who have lost faith – in people, in you, Lord. Touch them, we pray, with the gentle presence of your Spirit.

We bring the need of the world for **gentleness**, gentleness of thought, word, of action, gentleness towards self and to one another.

We bring our need of **self-control**. Help all people, Lord, the powerful and the powerless, to pause, to seek the guidance of your Spirit, that we might be able to show the way of Jesus to our hurting world, for it is in his name we offer this prayer. Amen



*Blessings, Ruth*