



“We exist for the sake of each other” by Jacob Lawrence

“For the body is not one member, but many.” I Cor.12.14

In this painting, we see a seated adult with four children of varying ages and cultural backgrounds in front of him. In his huge hands the adult tenderly holds a small tree with tendril roots. The man and the children are all looking at the tree intently and so we do too. We become conscious of the fragility of the tree and yet of its potential – a few shoots and leaves already in evidence.

If the tree is not tended, the painting seems to suggest, if we do not work together for its well-being, then something vital will be fractured. Indeed, the spiky twigs of the young plant create ominous cracks and fissures across the top of the painting.

**What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?**

The inter-connectedness of all life was what the painter, Jacob Lawrence, wanted to show us and, to be absolutely clear, he quoted from Marcus Aurelius (121-180AD) to title his work: “We exist for the sake of each other”.

Someone eats an animal in a far-away market and the world shuts down, assailed by a virulent disease. Covid 19 has highlighted our connectedness to each other as never before. The virus takes no notice of borders. Nor does human need. Wonderful instances of connected working in the face of the pandemic are in evidence wherever we look. We belong to one another, members of the same body, whoever and wherever we are.

For the Christian, a painting with a tree at its centre cannot but carry resonances of The Tree. Other things here also speak of crucifixion – the enormous hands, the spiky twigs, the rocky hill, the patient vulnerability of the man and the tomblike structure on which he sits... They point to the supreme example of interconnectedness which Jesus reveals on the cross...

Do you see any symbols of resurrection in the painting?

**“To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.”**

Karl Barth

## Prayer

**O God, our loving creator,  
renew in us a sense of  
connectedness with each other  
sharpen our sense of responsibility  
to those both far and near,  
and teach us to care more tenderly  
for our shared global home. Amen**