



19th March 2020

Dear parents, carers, staff and children

I thought I would write to you as we may not see each other for some time. I am sitting at home, feeling frustrated and sorry for myself, typing very slowly with my one good arm, and wishing I was at school with everybody else. I have not led an assembly for some time at school, so I thought I would write this letter as a virtual assembly.

You will have seen the latest announcements and read Lucy Hayward's letter about school closures. I understand how unsettling and frightening this situation may appear. We have been very fortunate over the last 75 years to live through a period where daily life for most of us has been reasonably predictable, consistent and reassuringly comfortable. We are now living through times which challenge that status quo. If my son's class WhatsApp group is anything to go by, some people are very frightened.

Sitting at home with aches, pains and my arm in a sling has given me some perspective. One minute I am cruising along St John's Road, the next I am in a heap on the pavement. In contrast, last week Mrs Oakley had a beautiful baby girl – Florence May weighing 9lb 2oz. We are all very happy for her. Bad stuff happens sometimes; good stuff happens everywhere all the time. Either way, almost always, COVID-19 has absolutely nothing to do with it.

When faced with difficult times, there are two sources of reassurance I turn to; the first is history.

We hear a lot about the "blitz spirit" and the heroic wartime generation. We hear less about the panic, profiteering and hoarding that took place on the outbreak of war in 1939. Throughout the war, measures such as rationing had to be put into place to regulate behaviour and ensure people had their fair share. Amidst the heroism and sacrifice, there was a good deal of moaning, whinging and outright anger. However, despite supply ships being sunk and bombs falling, people had enough to eat and they worked together over six years to help our allies bring victory. I think this puts a temporary shortage (caused by the panic of a few) of toilet rolls and penne quills into perspective. Nobody is sinking ships full of toilet paper and other essential supplies. We have a supply infrastructure vastly more sophisticated than 75 years ago. We will be okay.

As an aside a friend last night sent me a YouTube clip on how to successfully use just one sheet of toilet paper for what was necessary. While in equal measurers nail-biting (probably the wrong word) and reassuring, I can tell you now that it will not come to that.

My second source of inspiration is, of course, Bear Grylls. He says that when faced with difficult times it is easy to become overwhelmed. It is difficult to do the right thing when dwelling on fear and uncertainty and seeing issues as insurmountable. Bear says that any big problem should be seen as a set of challenges. Problems will arise and we need to focus on making decisions and solving them, one at a time. Bear generally solves them by scaling a ravine or squeezing drinking water from animal dung.

We need to learn from Bear. During this situation we will just be facing a series of challenges. Let us just solve the problems that arise day to day, one at a time, and know that getting through this period of uncertainty and back to normality is only a matter of time. And nobody will have to drink dung-water.

If you look at the school website (<https://st-james.kent.sch.uk>) you will see our new school vision and values on the welcome page. We have taken our inspiration from St James' the pilgrim. What is happening to us now is just a more challenging stretch of our journey through life – on the other side of this boggy stretch the path continues uninterrupted.

The children at St James' are, without exception, born to achieve great things. We will all help them to get there. We live in an incredibly connected world. Although we may not see each other face to face for some time, we will stay in touch with each other and we will look out for each other. We are here to help you. I cannot wait to get back to work; the staff team and governors at St James' are second to none while the diverse, wise and supportive parent community are the best any school could dream for.

Sorry if this sounds a little gushing. At the very least, if you have printed it out it will make an excellent substitute for toilet paper after you have read it. Oh, and keep washing your hands.

Kindest regards,
John Tutt

