

Good morning.

A few years ago, when I was rather fitter than I am today, I did a sponsored bike ride around England's cathedrals and was pretty pleased to raise £45,000. Huge respect then to Captain Tom Moore who has raised nearly 600 times that sum by walking round his garden. It was so moving to see members of his former military regiment forming a Guard of Honour for his final lap, and this week he will be opening one of the new Nightingale hospitals.

He has been quite rightly hailed as a hero for such remarkable achievements just short of his hundredth birthday. But heroes come in many shapes and sizes. When I hear the word hero, the image conjured up in my mind is that of a mighty, courageous figure, leaping in to save the day when all seems lost. People like Henry V ordering his troops into the breach. Or Terry Butcher leading the England team with blood all over his shirt. Or Victoria Pendleton mastering both cycling and horseracing. These heroes are so remarkable, so different from us, that all we can do is look on in admiration.

In the Christian tradition the word hero is used in rather a different way. In the Hebrew scriptures, Jeremiah looks to the day when the Lord will be at his side as a mighty hero, and for a Christian that prophecy is fulfilled right now as we keep Eastertide. By overcoming death, that greatest of enemies, Jesus is the hero who has defeated the grave and so is always at our side.

But there's a difference. Christians are called not just to admire Jesus from a distance. They are called also to be like him, to share in his heroism as they carry a message of good news to all. Jesus in effect throws open the category of hero to everyone.

That is precisely what this pandemic is doing. In hard times, people of courage will stand up and be counted, so the once elite category of the hero is all of a sudden being blown wide open. This morning there are heroes in every direction I look. NHS staff and care workers whose courage defies belief. Volunteers meeting the needs of the hungry and vulnerable. Those labouring hard to keep their companies or charities afloat. Parents who have suddenly become teachers. Children or older people bored to tears but nonetheless sticking to strict lockdown rules. All of these are heroes right now.

Our nation has suddenly become an army of heroes. And it's not just inspiring, it's how we will overcome this threat to our way of life. So as a new Coronavirus-dominated week begins, let's give thanks for our heroes.