

Only Human

Creatures of touch - creatures of talk -
we were busy telling the world
what was what - moulding the earth
to our shape - when a front rolled in -
some invisible weather infused
with a harm that leapt from hand
to hand - or spread by word of mouth -
made its lair in the lungs - its roost
on the tongue. For weeks then years
it was hard to belong - to be whole.
And months in between of holding
our nerve - the soul treading water
in heavy mist - the mind in amber -
time keeping step with the drumbeat
of grief and hurt - the daily count.

A great many lost. So here we pause.

We came through - kindled a heat
in the dark - candled our own hearts
till the air was fit to breathe again -
and witnessed a dawn of sorts
where we sang - spooned - snogged - smooched -
woke with a finer sense of the beings
we are - and what being is - gathered
together - unmasked - as creatures of thought.
In parks around the globe - blossoms
were culled to keep admirers away -
two years on those trees are budding
louder and fuller - with fruit to come -
apple and cherry - peach - pear - plum.
In the public gardens the poet wrote
We are better now - that is the hope.

Simon Armitage

Commissioned for a service at York Minster on the 23 March 2022 in remembrance of lives lost during the Covid-19 pandemic. The poem will eventually be engraved in a memorial garden in the grounds of the Minster.