

Locked down and not out.

A reflection on Easter Day 2020 Matthew 28:1-10

Christ is risen – he is risen indeed, Alleluia.

How you tell the story.

What's your take on Lockdown?

Fast forward a year, five years, ten years.

How will we tell the story then?

There are common threads

the threat, the government response - go hard, go fast;, stay home save lives.

There are personal threads

bubbles, feelings, surprise, loss.

There are wider threads

social inequity, employment, economic crisis, global impact.

We **are** telling and we **will tell** our own narrative of this world changing event;
Our story carries profound meaning when we **or** someone close to us is in pain
through illness,
through lost opportunity to be with a loved one dying,
through unemployment or business breakdown.

Today is Easter Day – the greatest day in Christian year. The first witnesses of this world changing event told the story again and again, each with common threads and with different stand outs according to their own experience.

This year we listen to Matthew who tells the story for people for whom whakapapa and provenance mattered. His account has parallels to his account of Jesus birth. Here are two examples. Herod is afraid of the infant Jesus, so he destroys all the boy babies.

The Jews have succeeded in killing Jesus, they are still afraid so they put a guard on the tomb.

When God is at work the angel tells Joseph- do not be afraid, continue with your wedding plans.

I love the angel's words to the women at the tomb: *'Do not be afraid'* then the assurance, *'I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.'* What's happening here is part of the plan.

The big story and this episode each begin with fear and end with overwhelming joy.

At the heart of good news story of Jesus is that death itself, our greatest fear, is overcome by Christ's resurrection.

'2020 life' as we knew it has been turned on its head by threat and isolation.

Isolation and separation were known by Christ in his life and death.

Both are turned on their head by resurrection.

Locked down but not out

This Easter weekend many of us can't do what we want to do! Regular patterns are disrupted. Special events like weddings have been postponed. We've seen in the media, some people are cross, but most are resigned and prepared to commit to the long game.

The women and men who lived through the shock and ugliness of Jesus' execution were in lock down.

John's gospel records them in a bubble in the upper room, for fear of the Jews. They are a long way from home, with the wrong travel documents, with their life-plan interrupted. They are smothered by fear.

The two Mary's who go to the tomb had endured the pain of witnessing Jesus' suffering.

They go in desolation, despair and grief.

When they see the stone rolled away it was not to let Jesus OUT but to let them in, so that they could see the reality of what God had done. The angel said '*Come, see the place where he lay*'.

The women leave 'with fear and great joy' to tell the disciples.

Jesus suddenly meets them, he says again, 'Do not be afraid'.

I find it hard to imagine their response....I imagine there's sensory overload, flooding thoughts. The emerging reality that what Jesus said would happen, HAD happened. He had been raised from the dead. The what, the how were beyond them.

They were **in the moment, walking into a different freedom.**

I hope we are still talking honestly with each other, although some days maybe harder. I hope you can phone your link person or me if it's one of those days.

In our bubble I have had time to think, walk, work, listen, pray. I have noticed that days come and go. A ministry day is different from a discretionary day – but something they have in common is that time seems different.

This experience is revealing things about myself. Relating in my bubble and responding to external stimuli – news reports, conversations, inter-actions, social media platforms is revealing gifts and weaknesses, qualities and responses, some for which I am thankful and some I prefer not to have!

This year my brother in England sent me a book, the *Lazarus Life: Spiritual Transformation for Ordinary People*, by Stephen W Smith.¹ He uses the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11 as a lens that enables us to grow into resurrected freedom in Christ. I was grabbed by it because twice a year for 10 years I went to Te Papa art gallery and sat on the floor in front of Colin McCahon's huge wall painting *Practical Religion: The Raising of Lazarus* ²thinking and praying, noticing how God was moving me through that narrative.

In the book Smith invites the reader to revisit events and people in our past and our responses in our present. Particularly those that have affected us, those that, in this metaphor, bind us up. Through questions and exercises he invites us to name delights and wounds, positive responses and constraining adaptation or addictions. We have the opportunity to leave our grave cloths behind.

As a counsellor myself for 20 years, I witnessed some people struggling without a connection with God's gifts of hope and grace. The story of the raising of Lazarus grounds our transformation and hope in the historical event of the resurrection of Jesus.

Taking time to walk in our imaginations into the tomb, enables us to walk out into the freedom of new life. Forgiveness for ourselves and, through God's grace, the gift of forgiveness for others. We enter God's new creation. We pray and work for God's new creation in transformation our communities and our world. These lengthening days of lockdown give us time to do this.

To conclude

How will we tell the story?

We don't know the end,

¹ Stephen W Smith, *The Lazarus Life : Spiritual Transformation for Ordinary People*. Colorado Springs : David C Cook, 2008.

² Colin McCahon, *Practical Religion The Raising of Lazarus with Mount Martha*.

<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/42511>

whether there is personal suffering ahead for us
what the economic effects will be.

May our telling have Jesus words, 'Do not be afraid.' woven through it.
May we know more fully God's peace that is more than positive thinking,
May we be assured that because Jesus is risen from the dead, we are raised with him.
May we experience light overcoming darkness
as we live God's story of hope and transformation.
May God refresh and renew us as we wait through these coming days.

Amen