

Reflection from 'Lock – Down' on John 11

John 11:1-45 Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130

Have you ever watched a baby take their first step? A video of a bird taking its first flight? Or have you set off on a new chapter in your life – leaving home, moving in or out of a relationship, another job, city or country.

Starting out is always difficult - --- **and** we have each done it before. This start up is different from any other. Think of the differences..... the ones that stand out to me, (you will have others) are everyone is doing it, it's not a choice.

The preparations that we started some weeks ago reached a mad scramble from Monday-to Wednesday, knowing that at midnight we would, as it were, ALL turn into pumpkins and what was not done was simply **not** done.

As you read the narrative of Jesus, Martha, Mary and Lazarus what stood out for you? Here are some things that stood out to me.

1. There is a crisis in the household. Lazarus is very sick. Martha and Mary know Jesus and they call him. Why? Because Jesus loves Lazarus.

Jesus loves this family. Jesus loves us more than we can ask or imagine. St Stephen's is a strong community with a long history of God's love shown amongst you and beyond. We have been digging into our mission statement for some months – we continue in our identity as the family of Christ together supporting each other and our community and our world.

2. Martha is angry with Jesus when he *finally* gets close – she goes out to meet him and cuts him off before he gets into the village - 'If you had been here my brother would not have died.'

Martha speaks honestly – isn't it interesting that we have traditionally been taught to see Mary as 'the spiritual sister' and yet in this narrative it is Martha who is so verbal and present with Jesus?

We are all multifaceted, different gifts emerge in different circumstances.

Over these days we need to be honest with ourselves and each other. The person who calls you as a representative of the parish is there not only as a friend but as someone with whom you can speak honestly. I am checking in with the family phone contact people. Please let us support you. We look with hope to what is opening up to us within the constraints of this time.

3. Jesus gets into the village, he doesn't go to the house. He is outside when Mary meets him, 'If you had been here my brother would not have died.' Mary repeats their despair.
Jesus is deeply moved by their pain. He goes to the tomb. He cries with them.

Jesus knows our frailties. He weeps when we weep. These weeks will bring pain and emotions that we cannot predict. Jesus, Son of God and Son of Humankind brings our human experience into the life of God. God into our humanity. We will explore this in prayer and Scripture reading, alone and together as the weeks pass. Read Psalm 130 from this service each day for this week. It is a psalm of waiting that reminds us of God's steadfast love and that the people of God have waited often in our history.

4. The cave tomb is detailed. Jesus says, 'Take away the stone'. Martha voices everyone's horror at the prospect of the putrid smell. Jesus persuades. He calls Lazarus out. Lazarus emerges from the darkness. Jesus commands the bystanders to remove the burial cloths and **let him go**.

Earlier Jesus has said to Martha 'I am the resurrection and the life, anyone who believes in me, even though they die, they will live.' The life Jesus gifts us is ours now and continues forever. Lazarus moves from the darkness of the cave into the light of new life, we can share Jesus life in these strange times with confidence. I think of my parents and grandparents putting up the blackout curtains in England in the 2 World War. Light was limited. Here today we are reminded that Christ brings freedom and light in dark times.

We can join with Christians all over the world lighting a candle each night at 7 pm, saying the Lord's Prayer and other prayers for our situation, gathering in prayer with others on Sundays through this service or other platforms. God will surprise us. The wonderfully graphic passage about the bones in Ezekiel reminds us that God's new normal, like Lazarus, will be vibrant and alive.

To conclude

I am confident that God has already nudged you into noticing something you may have heard before, but you are hearing differently today.

Getting started takes courage, there is risk.

We are blessed with strong government who have acted decisively.

We have started this new-normal;

we are making new rhythms and new patterns.

We are supporting each other.

As we find ourselves in this unexpected place,
as we recognize that what is ahead is going to be tough,
we secure our hope in God whose love is stronger than death
and whose presence never fails. Amen.

Sue Burns

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