

Jesus, Covid-19 and Us ...

29/3/20

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Give sentence with me, O Lord, and defend the cause of my soul against the Ungodly people: deliver me and rid me from the deceitful and wicked man: for thou, O Lord, art my God, and my strong salvation.

O send out thy light and thy truth, that they may lead me: and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

This is a very difficult time for all us as we travel through unprecedented times with the Covid-19 virus ravaging the world. Perhaps it is rather apt this morning that the Gospel reading set for the Anglican Church is the well known story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. This famed part of the Gospel deals with many themes that include fear, death, faith and everlasting life. Perhaps I may suggest that many of the themes we read about in the story of Lazarus are currently very prevalent in our lives too, at the moment, as we struggle with our possible mortality, fears and the unknown that this pandemic has introduced into our lives.

With this in mind, I recently came across an interesting reflection written by Paul Smith and Luke Healy, titled "The Jesus Path through the Pandemic". Both Paul and Luke write some very interesting ideas about how we, as Christians, should be responding and thinking during these challenging times that forces us to question the foundation of our beliefs, faith and mindsets. For once, our diaries are quiet, our agendas are closed, our daily activities and routines are put on hold and we are finally forced to face ourselves, who we really are deep down, our fears, uncertainties and anxieties. Yes, this is a stressful time that many of us would actually choose to avoid if at all possible. However, this can also be a time of deep spiritual growth for all of us if we grasp the opportunity

to reflect upon ourselves a little deeper this time, pray for ourselves, one another and the world. If done properly, perhaps we would be able to move into a deeper understanding of both ourselves and the love of Jesus, including what this means for our lives and the world.

Yes, I know and realise that this is no easy task during a lock down when we are grappling with the reality of a pandemic and all the associate fears that goes with that. But, if we are able, just for a moment every day, to still our frenetic thoughts, slow our breathing, distance ourselves from the intense media reporting and social platforms that so many of us are addicted to, then perhaps we will find a space to grow in our love and understanding of God. This is our challenge, as Christians, during this lockdown.

There are a few thoughts that I would like to share with you this morning with regards to the journey we all currently find ourselves in:

Firstly, we might ask ourselves the question, “How did Jesus live through fear?”

Jesus, being the unique and special person that He was, spread love and positive energy everywhere that He went. Jesus chose to focus His energy on love. This is important for us because the message that we need to take from this is that we have no guarantees of avoiding death and suffering. However, what we are always guaranteed of is His enduring love and care for us. Thus, our focus should not be on the fear of suffering and death but rather on His energy of love and healing. Here is the caveat: we are not freed from fear because we are always assured physical healing. No. Rather, we are freed from fear because we are always assured of His love and salvation! If we are able to reflect upon and believe in this, then we actually operate from a deeper base than fear. We rise above fear and rest in the love of Jesus.

When we base our lives on the love and light of Jesus, rather than fear, then we eventually become transmitters of that light to others around us. This then, in turn, continues to strengthen and grow the Body of Christ.

So, goal number one during lock down: **Be a transmitter of love NOT fear.**

Secondly, we need to ask ourselves the question, “Are we waking to Jesus?”

This is an important concept, for the challenge is asking us to move beyond theology and ritual and into a deeper spirituality with Jesus. Often, we are stuck in journey of faith without realising it and thus actually closed to a deeper relationship with Jesus. Do you remember the story in the Gospel where Jesus was asleep during a storm on a boat? Here we need to be asking ourselves the question, “Is Jesus asleep on the boat in the middle of the storm, or is it us who are asleep to the presence of Jesus and our spiritual guides who are already with us in the here and now?” We may be spiritually asleep without even knowing it. Our challenge during this time is to awaken our spirituality to Jesus so that we can move into a deeper and more fulfilling relationship with Him.

So, goal number two during lock down: **To ensure that we are awake to all that Jesus has to offer us.**

Thirdly, “How did Jesus handle His fear of death?”

Let’s be honest, all of us are scared at the moment, if not for our own lives, then perhaps for the lives of our loved ones. Many of us have lived safe and secure lives so far and this is the first time we are faced with the reality of our mortality. The Gospel stories teach us how Jesus did not go under with His struggle of death, nor did try to go over it, deny it or ignore it. Jesus had the integrity and faith to go through His death, fully engaging in it. We can too.

When we are able to confront our own mortality and move through that fear on the basis of our faith and love for Jesus and one another, then we are freed of the tyranny and paralysis of fear and anxiety. This, in turn, releases a multitude of energy that we can now feed into love and care for one another.

So, goal number three during lock down: **Engage with our fear of death and move through it to a deeper understanding of the love and light of Jesus.**

Perhaps we can sum this message up this morning in three basic steps:

- 1) Move to your heart: Move away from the consciousness of fear to your deep heart where you can rest in the energy and love of Jesus.
- 2) Be awake to your spiritual guides: Be aware of the love of Jesus in those who guide you. Rest in their comfort. In turn, share that same comfort with others.

3) Share the peace: Share the peace that you have discovered with others who are struggling. In this way we share the light of Christ with the world.

In conclusion, I am reminded of the words I wrote in my sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas...

“As we face the New Year ahead of us, there are no guarantees as to how the year will turn out. We will all face grief, suffering and pain at some point. We will also experience joy, happiness and laughter at many points. What we can always be sure of, and this is what makes it all worthwhile, is that the promises of God remain steadfast and sure, no matter what we may be going through. Jesus died for us so that we may be assured of eternal life and salvation. He will be with us every step of the way in 2020 and this is where our hope lies. Let us collectively, take our life lessons from 2019 and face 2020 with hope and joy, as we await further blessings from our God of light and love.”

Be safe.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, in this season of fear and uncertainty,

As we face the threat of the coronavirus,

Grant us the wisdom and determination to walk in one another's shoes,

The confidence and humility to draw closer to you and to those affected.

Empower us to pastor to those who are ill, to weep for the dead, to support the healers and to care for and love one another.

The blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always.

Amen.