

Service and Sermon Reflection – 29th March 2020 - Lazarus

This week, life for all of us has changed suddenly and dramatically out of all recognition amid the Coronavirus lockdown with all non-essential businesses and services closing, only being allowed out of our homes for limited purposes, being separated from our loved ones, and people suffering serious illness and dying.

It's a hard time for everyone and some might ask: "Where is God right now?" But, allow me to re-phrase the question: "Where are we *without* God?"

Today marks the beginning of Passiontide. For the next two weeks we turn our focus to the road to Jerusalem and the suffering Jesus will face through his death. Yet, Jesus comes to give us life. "Life," for Jesus, includes the cross and all the suffering that leads up to it. But that is not the last word. Through the mercy, grace, peace and love of God, there is hope and new life to be embraced as, at Easter, we celebrate Jesus' glorious resurrection.

Our Gospel reading today recounts the story of Lazarus, who is dying. Lazarus was a very dear friend of Jesus. Yet Jesus doesn't rush to save him. He waits, and by the time he arrives, Lazarus has been dead for four days. There is sadness and desolation, even Jesus weeps for his friend; there is consolation for each other as family and friends mourn their loss. There is faith and trust in Jesus that he will bring them peace; but they seem unable to see beyond the darkness of the time, beyond the veil of death. So, Jesus thanks God for hearing his cry and, by the grace of God, Jesus raises Lazarus to life again.

The story of Lazarus reveals something true about how we, too, can deal with the confusion and disorientation we face just now; as we perhaps wonder whether, or, at least, when, there will be a way out of all of this. Sometimes our concept of God is challenged at such times but *without* God there is no hope. And Jesus comes where and when we need him most, when hope seems lost. There, in those very places, God comes to weep with us and to shine light into the darkness.

Jesus gives Lazarus new life and he walks out of the tomb. Jesus dies on the cross, but then comes of the tomb as he rises again. In the darkness of this time, through His grace and mercy, the God of all love and peace, continues to surround us with his never-ending love and gives us his assurances of hope and new life.

This Lent may seem harder than usual but Easter and the Resurrection will come. Look to Jesus and let him give *you* life today.

Amen.