

Sunday Scribbling's 1 - Sunday 29th March 2020 – Passiontide begins.

As we are without an Incumbent and the Government has now closed all our church's for the foreseeable future as a precaution against COVID-19, I thought it might be helpful for some if I tried to pen a few words every Sunday until things start to get back to normal.

I hope they offer you some comfort and fill a little part of the sacramental void that is now upon us.

Today, the period of Passiontide begins. How apt.

Now, before reading this missive, please read the Lectionary readings for today. They are a little too lengthy to paste here in full, so you will need your Bible.

- Ezekial 37:1-14. **The Dry Bones.**
- Psalm 130, which starts with this; **“Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; ² Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy”.**

How very appropriate for the position we all now find ourselves in. More to the point, who says the Bible is no longer relevant!

- Romans 8:6-11. **Life Through the Spirit.**

⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”

Wow – The Bible just keeps on giving today. How about that for being relevant in today's climate of fear and worry?

- John 11:1- 45. **The Death of Lazarus.**

This is another long piece that you will need your Bible for; but it's well worth the read and a period of contemplation afterwards. Once you have read it, please come back and read my 'Imaginative Contemplation' on this reading. It's a style of prayer that you may not be used to, but one that can

really help to bring a passage to life and thereby deliver some snippets of comfort, truth and insight that you might not ordinarily pick up.

Here goes

Roy's Imaginative Contemplation on John 11:1-45.

The messenger arrives and tells my Lord; **“³Lord, the one you love is sick”**.

I'm confused as I thought he loved John, and maybe me as well; but how can I be certain? I must ask Him sometime. Maybe it's the heat and I misheard; it's just so unbearably hot today and oh so dusty.

I've got a mouth as dry and parched as the bottom of a parrot's cage. If only we has not cut down all the Cedar trees to build the temples then we would now have shade, water and possibly even more olive groves. Not to mention a more pleasant land to live in. If only....

We sit on the hard ground. There is little shade and the very high, thin cloud does little to shield us from the scorching, never ending, sun. It's a living torment.

“⁷Let us go back to Judea” He pronounces; and once more we are on the move again. Sometimes I wonder if I am cut out to be a Disciple. So much walking, so much giving; yet so little time for ourselves. And what about our families? I haven't seen mine for months.

And then one of our group pipes up and says; **⁸“But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”**

He takes no notice.

So headstrong ... So purposeful ... So mission driven ... So certain.

What drives Him I wonder? I must remember to ask Him later.

He continues **⁹“Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”**

What on earth does all that mean?

I'm parched. My feet hurt from all the walking and my heels are cracked. When will He just stop and rest.

But no chance of that today as ¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell us, **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."**

Sometimes I can't believe my ears.

Then more chit chat amongst us disciples before He once again stamps his authority on our dissent and says ¹⁴ **"Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."**

¹⁶ Then Thomas says; **"Let us also go, that we may die with him."** What's the matter with the man? And who said anything about dying anyway. Didymus!! I ask you, what kind of a name is that? No wonder he always doubts everything.

Without further ado we gird our loins and start walking back to Judea ... What a sad bunch of rag tag and bobtails we must seem as we disappear into the distance like a long, shaggy snake. Today, we are all struggling with the heat and I wonder if I should have stayed with John on the banks of the Jordan. I enjoyed those full immersion baptisms.

Fearlessly, He is striding out. Head held high, walking easily – as if He has real purpose. His gait is loose, long and easy. I struggle to keep up. My robes are sticky with sweat, my sandals useless in this rough, rocky terrain. The never-ending desert winds roast us alive just as if we are in an oven. My breath is short and laboured. My footsteps unsure.

After several days we eventually arrive at Bethany and Martha greets us with the news that Lazarus has been dead for four days – now what?

She is an amazing woman. I've heard a lot about her. She is a believer I know; but a 'believer in what' I have no idea.

Placid. Calm. Always calls Him 'Lord' ... just like we do. Clearly, she can 'see' something I cannot. It's almost as if she knows something for certain. But what can she possibly mean when she says; ²⁴ **"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

He replies; ²⁵ **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"**

Now I'm really confused. I've no idea what I believe. I used to think Isaiah and the Temple was linked to belief, but now that no longer seems to be true.

Make note to self: Tonight, after dinner, **I must** Him what it all means.

Mary appears. She's pretty. Very petit with long brown hair and large, soft eyes. They look like pools of peace; and I wonder why.

How strange – she uses the same words as her sister; ³²“**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**” Why? How?

Great gobs of salty tears were streaming down her beautiful, light olive coloured cheeks. Her skin is magnificent.

Then it dawns on me that everyone else is also crying. But why? We see death nearly every day, so what's special about this one?

He speaks out in His soft, but commanding voice; ³⁴“**Where have you laid him?**”

The air is pregnant with anticipation. My heart is pounding in my chest as I hope to witness another miracle. Don't understand them at all, but boy ... are they something to behold.

And now He is also crying.

I'm very uncomfortable. Totally unsure of what to do. What to say? How can I comfort my Lord?

I try to hide amongst the others so I can watch from a place of perceived safety.

Everyone moves towards the rocky tomb and He commands; ³⁹“**Take away the stone.**”

Surely not – Lazarus has been dead for four days now – and in this heat ... just imagine.

Martha argues to leave Lazarus's body as it is But He rebukes her saying ⁴⁰“**Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?**”

What in salvations name does that mean? Believe in what? Glory?

But some of the mourners come forwards and remove the grave stone. The air is electric with anticipation ... the desert heat now extreme ... all the mourners are now silent in anticipation ...or is it fear?

He looks up and says ⁴⁰“**Father, I thank you that you have heard me.** ⁴²**I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.**”

Then he calls out in a loud voice, ⁴³ “**Lazarus, come out!**”

And right there before my eyes I see Lazarus walking out of the grave, “**his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face**”.

He says to the mourners, ⁴⁴“**Take off the grave clothes and let him go.**”

Strangely, there is no smell of death ... Just a hushed acceptance that we have all witnessed the raw power and true majesty of God.

Now I know what Martha and Mary could ‘see’. No wonder they believed.

And so it must be with us.

To finish, let us pray ...

COVID-19 may be amongst us, but it is nothing when faced with the might and majesty of God. It is only human for us to be challenged by fear of the unknown; to have doubts; to let uncertainty taint our belief and thereby to test our faith.

Here, Mark 9:24 can help us; “**Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief.**”

But how to do this, especially at this time? Simple; just say to God in your prayers “Help”, and then brief Jesus on what’s troubling you. Yes, of course He already knows what the problem is, but the challenge is to get your human mind and soul set to ‘Receive’ ... and to do that you need a bit of humility.

We all need to climb down from whatever pedestal we might be on, admit our fears, and our failings, and then to truly lean on the heart of God and thereby renew our secret store of hope; because with hope your resources of belief and faith will be renewed.

Do not let fear get the better of you during this difficult time. Rather, let common sense, hope and faith in Jesus be your guidelines for the coming weeks and years.

So why not look upon our enforced period of isolation as a gift from God. Why not take time to really get to know both God and Jesus better. Open your hearts to Jesus so that each and every one of us, like Lazarus, may enjoy the position of being **“The one who Jesus loved”**.

And therein lies the paradox of our faith. Whatever you do or have done, He already loves you - unconditionally. The question therefore, is, “Will you love Him in return?”

“Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief”

Amen.

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