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## Loop Special – 2<sup>ND</sup> Sunday of Easter 2020

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**Readings for Sunday: Ps 16; Acts 2.14a + 22-32; John 20.19-31**

### Collect

Risen Christ,  
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:  
open the doors of our hearts,  
that we may seek the good of others  
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,  
to the praise of God the Father.  
Amen.

### *Peter's Easter reflection:*

'**God has a plan**' - that's a common way of speaking, but what sort of plan is it? What is God's plan? In 2010 I had the great privilege of being the chaplain for a group that made a pilgrimage to include the Oberammergau Passion Play. Like so many of us, I had heard about the play, but never imagined being able to go. And, to be honest, I'm not sure that I expected to learn much from the play, though I was sure it would be impressive. In the event, it opened me to a part of the biblical story that I had missed before - and that, in turn, set off deep and continuing reflection on the meaning of God's act and grace in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Every time the Passion Play is performed there is an intensive period of preparation: a time that involves seeking to understand the scriptures afresh, and to bring the wisdom of the Bible and the whole Christian tradition to shed light on the needs of our world today. I know nothing of the contours of that investigation. I only know what it was like to see the play. What came across so clearly was so obvious that I am astonished I hadn't seen it before. What the performance managed to do was to enable the audience to see how the unfolding drama of Jesus' passion and death looked and felt to all the participants - and the overwhelming realisation that none of them understood more than a little tiny piece of what was happening. That in turn meant that the unfolding events caught many of them by surprise. This wasn't what they had intended, but now they couldn't stop it. Even Pilate, with all the power of a Roman ruler, intrigued by the figure of Jesus, ends up concluding that this is probably just a squabble between rival Jewish factions and it is best to let them get on with it. In other words, it is very much like our present responses to the Coronavirus: we are becoming more and more angry at the apparent failure to organise testing and to provide protective equipment - and we interpret what the government says as best we can. But we only know what we know - and that is not so much! What quickly happens is that groups then mobilise, putting on pressure for this or that. And before we know it, a whole series of events have taken place and suddenly there is no going back.

Sitting watching the Passion Play in Oberammergau ten years ago, that same sense of horrifying inevitability struck me hard. This is how human beings are. Individually, we may all be trying to be good, but time and again, misunderstandings and factional interests get in the way and events take a course we never wanted or intended. It was indeed we human beings who brought about the death of Jesus, just as we bring about so many disasters in the

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world day after day. It was not that God 'planned' to have Jesus executed. That would be to suggest a God in whom we could not believe; a Father who would willingly give his only Son to torture and death. It was the warring interests of Jesus' followers, the Roman authorities, the competing Pharisees and Sadducees who, together, set in train the actions that led to Jesus being crucified. This was not God's plan, it was not even our plan: the collision of circumstances brought everything to a tipping point and the disaster happened.

Of the four Gospels it is John, the fourth and the last to be written that understands all this best. Amazingly, scholars now conclude that John's is the text that has the most historically accurate chronology for the events of the passion (you might have thought that Mark would be most accurate, being written so soon after the events). And it is John who best helps us understand the meaning - not least when we ask 'What is God's plan?' John's text is a densely woven tapestry. You have to keep holding all the pieces together; and individual texts that contain a moment of illumination only reveal their full light when taken together. So, in Chapter 8 Jesus says, "you will know the truth and the truth will make you free." Truth is central to the whole Gospel. Jesus is, "the Way, the Truth and the Life." Pilate asks "What is truth?" But so is freedom. John wrestles with the paradox, seeking to understand how God, who gave creation freedom, can come to save us from ourselves. John wants us to understand the gulf between our situation, where we find ourselves locked into an unfolding series of events over which we seem to have no control, and the endless freedom and truth of God. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all people to myself," says Jesus. We hear this as referring to the cross, but it is first an allusion to the bronze serpent Moses made at God's command to heal those bitten by snakes in the wilderness.

All this has a special force when it comes to John's shaping of the Resurrection. As we noted, this is the last Gospel to be written, yet the Resurrection stories are the seemingly most detailed, most intimate: Jesus cooking breakfast for his friends on the lake shore; Jesus inviting Thomas to put his hand into the wound in his side; and Jesus with Mary Magdalen, when she mistook him for the gardener. There is little doubt but that this level of detail is precisely because the original events are now fading from memory - and they need to be kept alive. But also because the immensity of God's generosity in the death and resurrection of Jesus needs to be appreciated afresh in every generation, and John is wonderfully gifted in helping us see that it is both incredibly personal and intimate (think of Thomas and Mary Magdalen) but also shared and universal (think of that breakfast by the lake, or the disciples crowded into an upper room and Jesus coming and breathing over them, "Peace be with you!")

If then we are to speak of God's plan we are referring to the mysterious way in which God's love for creation is such that 'nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God' as Paul has it. God takes everything we throw at him, all the schemes and plottings that bring about disaster and, by taking it all into Godself, changes the conclusion. As John sees it, there can be only one end and that is intimate, joyful communion in the unending company of the God who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is risen indeed, alleluia!

With love and greetings to all, for a truly blessed Easter.

Peter CR



**Mary-Lou writes ...** One of the very remarkable aspects of this awful time is the mix we all experience of sadness, separation and sorrow, but also amidst it all, real blessings. Some have already created for themselves a **Jar of Blessings**, to capture the kindnesses, the goodness, the love and blessing they receive. Try it! Just have a container (it doesn't need to be a real jar) and some scraps of paper, or tags, and every day, find one thing for which to give thanks – one blessing. These are signs of God at work among us and signs of Christ's Resurrection! Look for them and you will find them! Then **please tell us!** We would love to create a virtual jar of blessings that we can share to encourage one another through this Easter season. **'... in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.'** St Paul, writing in **Philippians 4 vs 6**. The peace of God guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.