

Easter and pandemic anxiety

How strange is pandemic anxiety. We are at home, all sufferings from global pandemic anxiety. And with good reason; coronavirus is very infectious. Lives are at risk. 1000 people are dying in the UK each day. We must do the right thing. Stay at home.

At Easter the disciples felt acute anxiety. And they too stayed at home.

The gospels choose two anxious snap shots, two snaps shots of the disciples at home together.

Firstly a snap shot of the night before Jesus died. On Maundy Thursday the disciples celebrated the Passover with Jesus.

Just as in the first Passover story, told in Exodus 12, the doors of their large upper room, in their borrowed home, were shut.

Outside was not a virus, but people who intended to harm the people of God. A Passover lock down. God promised them safety. Yes God wants a safe society. Their wellbeing was in the hands of each other.

The safety instructions were not to wash one's hands with soap for 20 seconds. What kept the house safe was lamb's blood smeared on the lintel of the front door.

So there we have the first snap shot. A picture of the disciples together, everyone anxious, in the upper room on Maundy Thursday.

With the Passover meal finished, Jesus washed their feet. And it was dark when Jesus went out into the night. Reluctantly the disciples followed. It was going to be dangerous.

The enemies of Jesus were ready to capture God's Passover lamb.

Which brings us to Easter Day. The second snap shot.

Once more the disciples were at home. In their locked room. Outside was dangerous.

Outside, as the sun came up, some women risked going into the garden; the garden where Jesus had died on the cross.

In the garden was a tomb, where Jesus had been laid. Guards were posted, and a large stone was rolled across the entrance.

The women had gone to the garden, not to exercise, but in great anxiety. It was a dangerous place. They had to persuade the soldiers to let them tend the body, and perhaps also ask the soldiers to help them move the stone.

The women's acute anxiety was mixed with trauma. They had recently watched Jesus die on a cross.

Let's go back to the Easter locked room.

We have established the disciples inside were anxious. That is why they had locked the door. Outside was dangerous. And they, like the women, were suffering from the trauma of Jesus' death on a cross. Their hopes had died too. They were bereaved. Emotions like shock, denial, guilt and blame were in their hearts.

One of them unlocked the door to let the women in.

Appearing utterly bewildered, the women had a startling message, "the body has gone, the tomb is empty".

Two disciples decided to break the "stay at home" rules. Peter and John went into the dangerous outside.

They rushed to the garden, and there found the tomb empty, apart from curiously folded grave-cloths.

OK let's go back to the Easter locked down home.

Once back behind locked doors Peter and John gave their account. Their message was the same as the women's message. "The body has gone, the tomb is empty".

Now I want to pause. Let's unpackage the scientific explanation of pandemic anxiety.

Here's how, right now, we are suffering from pandemic anxiety.

When we are exposed to threats, and need to deal with danger, our brains spring into action.

A tiny, innocent looking thing, the size of an almond, behind the ear, called the amygdala, is buzzing, buzzing like an angry wasp.

The buzzing amygdala came into being, some time back in time, when humans got threatened by angry animals.

Say there is a bear outside. When someone spots a bear, a warning is shouted, and the amygdala starts buzzing.

The buzz says 'fly, run – fast'. And because our body is filled with chemicals such as cortisol and adrenaline. our heart rate goes up, we become super alert, our breathing goes shallow, and our muscles are ready for action.

'Run' our body says. 'Run' the amygdala says to the disciples. Their breathing and their heart rate goes up.

Flight. Run. // Once you have been to the empty tomb, there is nowhere to run to.

Following a crucifixion, the disciples lock the doors. Nowhere to run to. They must stay inside.

During pandemics, we must "stay at home". There is nowhere to run to. We must stay behind closed doors.

So let's return to the Easter locked home.

Inside everyone is bewildered. The news the women gave, the news Peter and John confirmed, is bewildering. All agree Jesus' body is not there.

It is at this strange, out of control moment, that the Passover story restarts itself. Thursday's story, and Friday's story, meets Sunday's story.

John 20.19 following....

"On the evening, of the first day of the week, the doors of the house where the disciples met, were locked for fear of what lay outside, when Jesus, the Passover lamb, came and stood amongst his friends, saying 'Peace be with you'..."

Jesus was concerned for the disciples were in flight mode, yet locked inside...

'So Jesus said again, peace be with you'. And because the disciples' heart rate and their breathing were too fast, he said 'Receive the Holy Spirit, my Spirit. Jesus ventilated the disciples; he breathed in them his forgiving love'.

Their heart rate, their breathing, their muscles ready to run, their amygdala returned to normal. Jesus was gifting God's peace.

And Jesus then filled his disciples with forgiveness anti-bodies.

"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them..."

At Easter, in a home with the risen Lord Jesus, our neighbour's wellbeing and our wellbeing our bound together.

"My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you".

Hallelujah. Christ has risen. He has risen indeed!