

What are you doing in the quiet moments of this unusual time?

Reading? Writing a journal? Listening to music? Watching old films? Supporting others?

What quiet moments some of us will ask? Working from home, worrying about finances, home-schooling the children there seems so little time that isn't occupied with worry and concern.

Maybe more than ever one needs to find a few moments to stop and contemplate.

Re-assess the purpose, priority and potential of our fragile, fleeting and beautiful life?

My mum is 92 years old and she loves nothing more than hearing from her great-grandchildren, using the swing in the garden and doing the crossword in the daily newspaper, often completing it unaided.

Sometimes the questions of life seem to me to have similarities to a crossword puzzle.

Occasionally they are - 6 Across – *not difficult* (5 letters)

More often there is - 9 Down - *uncertainty* (9 letters)

But just occasionally it requires - 11 Across - *out of the box* (13 letters 8-5)

It seems to me and this was what was required by Martha and Mary when they were faced with the unexpected illness of their Brother Lazarus. They were very good friends of Jesus and he often stayed at their home in Bethany when he was visiting Jerusalem. You perhaps know the story of when he popped in unannounced with his 12 disciples as recounted in Luke chapter 10. The occasion when Martha had a falling out with her sister Mary over the catering arrangements.

A year or so later, when Lazarus fell ill and the doctors could not help, the sisters sent word to Jesus. They mopped his brow, prayed and begged Jesus to come: John chapter 11.

*“Come now, please Jesus! Lazarus, your very dear friend is very sick.”*

*John records in his gospel that when Jesus heard this he said “This sickness of Lazarus will not end in death. No, it is happening for God’s purposes so that the glory of the Son of God will be revealed in this.” So, although Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus he stayed where he was for the next two days.*

By the time Jesus arrived it was too late. Lazarus had died. As is the custom in the Middle East, Lazarus had been buried within 24 hours and when Jesus finally arrived, he had been in the tomb for four days. Almost a week had passed since the sisters had sent for Jesus and only now he comes.

How could they make sense of that?

It is as though Jesus says there is a bigger picture which cannot be explained but only experienced.

In two weeks time they would begin to see things from a different perspective.

But for now in the confusion and pain of grief it just hurts.

Jesus weeps with them. He stands at the entrance of the tomb and feels the pain and the loss and the devastation that death brings to hope, to dreams, to friendship, to relationships, to life.

He weeps from the very depths of his being until it erupts in a cry and a loud command

*“Lazarus, come out of there! Come back to life!”*

Four days after being laid there Lazarus walks out the tomb still wrapped in the grave clothes.

Within two weeks Jesus will also leave his borrowed tomb three days after being laid there and leave behind the grave clothes he was wrapped in, perhaps the ones borrowed from Lazarus?

Just like the sudden illness of Lazarus or the unexpected storm on the sea of Galilee we spoke of last week, the storms of life are many and various and they often come unexpectedly and suddenly.

They rock our world and sometimes change it beyond recognition but we can choose faith over fear.

Hope over despair. We can choose to trust that Jesus is right when he says there is a bigger picture.

Lazarus came out of his coffin after four days and ten days later Jesus came out of his after three. Martha and Mary and Lazarus experienced a paradigm shift, a change of perspective, a new way of looking at things, blue sky thinking, thinking outside the box!

They had seen Jesus' miracles of healing and had called him "Lord" for three years. Many people can cure the sick, Doctors and even charlatans but no-one has ever raised a four day old rotting corpse before. Truly this revealed His Glory and it calls us like them to re-evaluate, to shift our paradigm. To begin to think outside of the box when we call Jesus Lord. How exciting. What an adventure lies before us in the days or years ahead.

Like Martha and Mary and Lazarus we need to think outside the box when we call Jesus Lord. Because one thing we do know is that Jesus has travelled this way before and will walk it with us today. He invites us to come with him to his father's throne of grace to find help in time of need.

What could that mean for us in our locked-down tension filled house, or our uncertain future, or our unexpected illness or bereavement?

*Romans ch.8. 1 Corinthians 15:55 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Hebrews ch.2:15. ch.4:12-16*

*Romans 15:13. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

John ch.11:17-44

*On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than 2 miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus stood at the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," Jesus said. "But, Lord," said Martha, "by this time there will be a terrible stench, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*