

OPENING:

The story goes that scientists discovered that a giant asteroid was heading towards planet Earth and would arrive with devastating effects that Monday.

Three ministers in the town thus gathered at the local coffee shop to discuss what they were going to preach at their *final* Sunday service.

The first, a Presbyterian minister, said “I am going to preach on the predestination of the elect and the sovereignty of God—the hallmarks of our denomination.”

The second, a Baptist pastor, said “Well, likewise, I am going to preach on God’s judgement, the forgiveness of sins, and how we are all washed in Christ’s blood.”

The two then looked at the Episcopal priest in their midst, becollared and silent. The Episcopal priest paused and stared at his two colleagues..... and said..... “Well, in the light of this moment I thought I might take a look at the Lectionary and see what the lessons are for this Sunday.”

TIME:

Our sense of time, our understanding of the calendar, the notion of seasons, Holy Days, the Sabbath are an important part of living the Christian faith. We take comfort in them and in our Lectionary because it reminds us that we are in God’s time and not our own.

Now, the Church would have preferred for all this to have happened during *Ordinary* Time, the extended time period after Pentecost, when Sundays seem to go on and on, when people are on summer vacation and life slows down.

But....

instead,

we find ourselves most assuredly in the most *extraordinary* of times, staring right down the barrel of a Lent that we will never forget, with Holy Week and Easter approaching fast.

At this moment in our history, we don't really need a reminder that we are living in *extraordinary* times, but we might need a reminder that God still holds us in his hands.

During this 'oh so not Ordinary Time' we share Mary and Martha's frustration at Jesus: "why don't you hurry? Why don't you fix this? Why not now?"

(We ask ourselves)

How do we make sense of our lives in the midst of this global pandemic?

How do we listen and look for God amidst the noise and confusion of now?

There are no easy answers. Maybe the priest from our story was right: what *does* the Lectionary have to say?

JESUS AND LAZARUS

Famously, our Gospel story shows Jesus' full range of human emotions.

We get to see a Jesus who grieves, who weeps, who gets angry, who is "disturbed in spirit."

Lazarus' death brings out this terrific range of emotions in Jesus, as he tries to manage his own grief and the expectations placed on top of him.

This extraordinary time of the COVID-19 virus has brought forth a similar range of emotions in us. Out of the normal patterns of life, our normal coping mechanisms have been disrupted. As a consequence, things are different, and we are all struggling in different ways.

Some of us might be working overtime, with kids at home whom you now have to teach, while balancing your own job.

Some of us have had our jobs uprooted and our means of income and productivity diminished or eliminated, wondering what the future looks like.

Some of us are struggling with not being to leave the house, with the isolation and anxiety caused by social distancing.

Finally, some of us are in the frontline of the struggle, either as doctors, nurses, health care professionals, or are suffering from the illness itself.

All these emotions and struggles are valid, they are normal, they are our body and mind and soul's way of managing these changes and conflicts.

It's okay to worry, it's okay to feel overwhelmed, it's okay to feel anxious.

For me, if I get one more email from a company or an organization telling me what I should or should not be doing during this time, I might scream... during this Extraordinary time!

Our coping mechanisms are what they are but Jesus has the ability to operate in both times, in God's time, as he is not rushed into the situation in our story, as he can see the long arc of history and God's plan for salvation. Meanwhile, Jesus also lives in human time. He grieves, gets sad, gets mad.

You can't put it any better than John does here in verse 35, the shortest verse in all of Scripture, "Jesus wept."

HEARING and SEEING:

A two word description that sums it all up.

I wonder... how a short sentence might describe how *we* responded in this crisis?

One possible answer is from this new technology that we have been using: whether it's Zoom, or Facetime, or Google hangout, we have all had to depend on various ways of Teleconferencing and Video Chatting so that we can catch a glimpse and sound of one another.

(Thank God for these capabilities and means of communicating during this time.)

A remarkable moment sometimes happens during these ZOOM meetings, particularly the first time using them, as you are trying to get it set up. As people are appearing on the screen, you begin to see your friend or colleague's faces with their living room in the background and you hear their voice.

As people come online, and the video and audio starts to work; People shout out:

"I can see you!" "I can hear you!"

"I can see you" "I can hear you."

Maybe that's what Mary and Martha said as they saw Lazarus come out of the tomb.

"I can see you! I can hear you! Can you see me?"

"You are alive. You are one of us. You are still with us."

CALLING

Would “I can see you. I can hear you” be an accurate description of who we are during this time?

I was going for a run the other day, in one of the subdivisions behind the church, I was listening to music and trying to clear my head.

I was running on the sidewalk next to a group of houses and I was wearing this sweatshirt with “Slippery Rock University”

While I was running, I saw a couple come out of their townhome and they immediately started gesturing at me and saying something, I could hear them over my headphones “GO Slippery Rock! Woohoo! Yeah!”

I did not attend Slippery Rock, I don’t know anyone that did, I don’t know where it even is. I just like the sweatshirt. But when those strangers saw me, recognized me, I suddenly felt more alive, more connected, more seen and heard.

I have been trying to pay attention to those type of moments amidst of all this, those moments where you remember that you are alive, and that others are too.

CONCLUSION

In our gospel, Jesus shouts: “Lazarus, Come out.”

Jesus’ raising of Lazarus is a foreshadowing of Easter Morning, a Resuscitation that previews the Resurrection.

In this most extraordinary of times, we are called to call each other out of our tombs. To check on each other, to unbind one another, if from afar, with our love and care.

One way is to say: “I see you, I hear you.

You are my brother and you are my sister. I weep, I am greatly disturbed, I am troubled in spirit but I know you and I love you.

I can see you. I can hear you.”

AMEN