

**Easter 2020****Covid-19 Lockdown****12<sup>th</sup> April 2020****Readings:**

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Col.3:1-4

John 20:1-18

**Homily:****Alleluia! Christ is Risen!****He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Really? Have you seen Him? Has he spoken your name? Or are you alone in the garden, faced with an empty tomb of isolation....grief-stricken, anxious, worried about the future - work, housing, finances, family and friends, loneliness?

Easter Day in 2020 Aotearoa New Zealand means we're halfway through Week 3 of Alert Level Four Lockdown. You all know what that looks like – on Holy Saturday that sadly meant four deaths, twenty-nine new cases with a total of 1312 people infected including two rest-home clusters in Christchurch. (I won't bombard you with more figures as we are all well aware of the effects of this devastating global pandemic.)

'This Holy Week feels like a moment of mourning at the foot of the cross,' (reflect women from Washington) 'not rejoicing at the empty tomb.'<sup>i</sup> But the self-giving love of Jesus in the moment of his death is present all around us right now:

In the doctors, nurses, caregivers, and community members present to those suffering and dying from COVID-19.

In the essential personnel, who risk their health to provide for and serve their communities.

In the families, balancing childcare, schedules, finances, schooling, and play.

In the ministers - including and especially women - who labour long hours to creatively bring church to life in the absence of the physical presence of community.

In the People of God, those who ache for communion in the face of continued isolation.

That love doesn't stay at the foot of the cross - it is breathed out into an aching, wounded world to offer healing, comfort, and justice.

We feel the pain of these times. But we also trust that we *are* Easter people.'

So what does that mean for us in 2020 and into the future?

Right now, "Wash your hands" "Wash your hands" is the important catch cry! Washing hands saves lives.

Hmm....didn't someone wash their hands in our Passion story? Oh yes, Pontius Pilate washes his hands of Jesus and hands him over to be crucified. Well it might have saved Pilate's skin in answering to the Roman Emperor but it certainly didn't save *Jesus!* .... did it?

Social distancing...isolation. It's all about containment...or is it elimination.

For Pilate, it was containment of social order and elimination of nuisance-factor and tension in Jerusalem. For the religious leaders it was containment of Jewish Law and elimination of Jesus the Nazarean – who dared to identify as Son of God.

For us, a sub-microscopic Coronavirus has stopped the world in its tracks as we seek to contain its life-threatening spread and eliminate it from our communities and nations.

Yet, even as the afflicted struggle to breathe, and we try not to breathe on one another, our planet now breathes a little easier. Is this the resurrection life we are invited to experience, even as we look into the darkness of death and pray for all who are affected? Is Mother Nature inviting us into new life?

I was struck by the power of this 'Holy Saturday' poem for Papatūānuku – Mother Earth<sup>ii</sup>, written by Nadine Anne Hura, and recently shared by our Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern:

*Rest now, e Papatūānuku*

*Breathe easy and settle*

*Right here where you are  
We'll not move upon you  
For awhile  
We'll stop, we'll cease  
We'll slow down and stay home  
Draw each other close and be kind  
Kinder than we've ever been.  
I wish we could say we were doing it for you as much as ourselves  
But hei aha we're doing it anyway  
It's right. It's time.  
Time to return  
Time to remember  
Time to listen and forgive  
Time to withhold judgment  
Time to cry  
Time to think  
About others  
Remove our shoes  
Press hands to soil  
Sift grains between fingers  
Gentle palms  
Time to plant  
Time to wait  
Time to notice  
To whom we belong  
For now it's just you*

*And the wind*

*And the forests and the oceans and the sky full of rain*

*Finally, it's raining!*

*Ka turuturu te wai kamo o Rangi ki runga i a koe*

*Embrace it*

*This sacrifice of solitude we have carved out for you*

*He iti noaiho – a small offering*

*People always said it wasn't possible*

*To ground flights and stay home and stop our habits of consumption*

*But it was*

*It always was.*

*We were just afraid of how much it was going to hurt*

*– and it IS hurting and it will hurt and continue to hurt*

*But not as much as you have been hurt.*

*So be still now*

*Wrap your hills around our absence*

*Loosen the concrete belt cinched tight at your waist*

*Rest. Breathe. Recover. Heal –*

*And we will do the same.*

Many will understandably long for a return to 'normal', but humanity's 'normal' is the problem! Edward Edinger wrote well before Coronavirus appeared: "We are living in the Holy Saturday of history."<sup>iii</sup> Yet, we are called to resurrection life - transformation on a global scale. We are called – each one of us – beyond the empty tomb. We are called to a way of life beyond our imagining. And the Risen Christ shows us the way.

The Easter Day gospel according to John takes us, with Mary Magdalene, to the empty tomb. While Simon Peter and the other disciple check the tomb and then return to their homes, Mary remains outside the tomb, weeping. The appearing angels ask a question of her:

*“Woman, why are you weeping?”*

Mary weeps for what was lost – her beloved Jesus. She weeps for what was in the past, paralysed by grief, so much so that she fails to recognise the transformed gift – the Risen Christ - in her midst.

In 2020, the whole world – and each one of us – waits at an empty tomb, perhaps longing for what used to be our ‘normal’ way of life. While we do so as Easter people, do we dare to wait, watch and pray for transformation?

As Jungian analyst Joy Ryan-Bloore writes in this year’s Lenten retreat notes:

*‘In these unprecedented times when the whole of humanity has been brought to our knees, we have a choice. Are we going to return to the old 'normal' or wait with Magdalene outside an empty tomb of what used to be? For what used to be is no more and what is yet to come has yet to make itself known. Let us each 'stay' with Magdalene waiting for the Risen One to rise in our hearts once more.’*

**Alleluia! Christ is Risen!**

**He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Helen Roud

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<sup>i</sup> Women's Ordination Conference, PO Box 15057, Washington, DC 20003

<sup>ii</sup> <https://m.facebook.com/yoga.with.deidre/posts/246798306714289>

<sup>iii</sup> Edinger, Edward F. The Christian Archetype. Inner City Books, Toronto. (1987) p.119