

Gifted Time, Patient Hope and the Resurrection to come

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Have you all remembered to spring your clocks forwards this morning? On more than one occasion I've led worship on the last Sunday of March and towards the end of the service someone has turned up looking embarrassed, having forgotten to change the clocks and ending up running an hour behind the rest of the world.

There's no chance of us turning up to church an hour late today though, and what we do and when is largely our own business at the moment. Many of us are spending our days differently to how we usually would as we embrace and settle into what our new and temporary 'normal' is going to be.

I've spent the week using technology differently to normal, done a shift at the foodbank for the first time, made lots of phone calls and have even managed to clear 1 of the many piles of 'stuff' that have been collecting in my office over the last 12 months.

How we spend our time can be important at the best of times. What we do impacts us and can impact others, positively or negatively. This week the question of 'what does a minister do now?' has not been far from my mind as I discern how best to minister in church and community when we are distant and isolated from one another. I am sure I am not alone as I grapple with that question of how best to use my time?

How best do we use our time today?

In today's gospel reading (John 11:1-45), people don't think Jesus gets his timing right. On day 1 of the story, Jesus gets the message that Lazarus is ill. Mary and Martha wanted Jesus to come to them, but Jesus doesn't. He waits, continues in the place he was, doing whatever he had been doing. 2 days later, he says to his disciples, let's go, let's head to Bethany.

But to Martha at least, Jesus is late. He got his timing wrong, took too long dilly-dallying and now Lazarus is dead. Yet in the midst of the grief and emotion she was experiencing, Martha is faithful and hopeful:

Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' John 11:21-22

As the story goes on, they head to the tomb, Mary joins them, and Jesus asks for the stone to be rolled away, and call's to Lazarus 'come out', and out comes Lazarus.

Death leads to life.

Waiting leads to still holds possibility.

Hope leads to resurrection.

As ever with John's gospel there is so much that could be said of this passage, but I wonder today, in this period of isolation and distance in our world, if we have something to gain from reflecting on Jesus' use of time.

Jesus doesn't rush to Lazarus, Martha and Mary - despite how deep John's gospel portrays their friendship. He pauses, takes time and continues what he was doing. Only then, after he had taken time, did he go.

And by then all must have seemed lost to the community in Bethany, because Lazarus was no longer ill. He was dead, hope was gone, death had won. But then Jesus came. But then Resurrection came.

'I am the resurrection and the life.' (John 11:25)

We live, 'normally' in a fast paced society. Where waiting and patience are not always normative to us. Where we expect to find the food we want to buy on the shelves when we go shopping. When we sometimes expect leaders, medics and governments to have all the answers. When, as pragmatic people of faith who know faith necessities action, we want act, do and somehow respond with pace to make a difference in times of adversity and challenge.

But what I'm struck by is that Jesus doesn't respond quickly. He continues what he was doing, and then, after time, heads to Bethany. By then, by all accounts all hope was lost - but it was only then, when death had seemingly won, that resurrection truly came, when hope became a true reality.

As we live in this period of distancing, waiting for the resurrection that will one day come, knowing the world is ill but being powerless to do anything about it except stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives, **we have a gift of time.**

We are in a time of waiting, this time will pass and resurrection will come, but this time is also a time in itself to use well. For ourselves, for others, for our relationship with God. An extended time of *Sabbath Rest* perhaps? So I encourage you, this week, to think about how you will use this time.

Take time to Pause

Take time to finish things.

Take time to spend with God as you need do

Take time to prepare for the resurrection to come

There's a poem that was on a poster I had in my bedroom as a teenager. I can't find it now, I guess it went in one of our house moves. There seem to be various versions of it online, and I can't find it's original author, but I leave it with you to read, reflect, pray through and allow the Spirit to guide you with, as we take this gift of time we have and seek to use it well, with patient hope, knowing resurrection is to come.

Take time to think; it is the source of power.

Take time to read; it is the foundation of wisdom.

Take time to play; it is the secret of staying young.

Take time to be quiet; it is the opportunity to see God.

Take time to be aware; it is the opportunity to help others.

Take time to love and be loved; it is God's greatest gift.

Take time to laugh; it is the music of the soul.

Take time to be friendly; it is the road to happiness.

Take time to dream; it is what the future is made of.

Take time to pray; it is the greatest power on earth.

Author Unknown