

Reflection for Sunday 22nd March 2020

Rev Roger Smith

'Lazarus, come out!'

Read John 11: 1-45 (take your time!) and then the poem 'now'

now,
it is no longer
an exegetical puzzle
to be solved in our study;
it is no longer a pericope*
with which to wrestle;
it is no longer a (really)
long reading to get through;
it is no longer a story
we blow the dust off every 3 years.
now,
it is our story;
now
it is about us;
now
it is us inside that
dank, dark tomb:
stinking of fear,
wrapped in the bands
of loneliness;
blinded by the handkerchief
of weary worry.
now,
we hope,
we pray,
we yearn,
we listen
for just a footstep,
just a tear dropping on the ground,
just a whisper of Jesus
pacing before the stone,
growling in his spirit
in anger and frustration,
before he cries out,
in hope and joy and life,
'come out!'

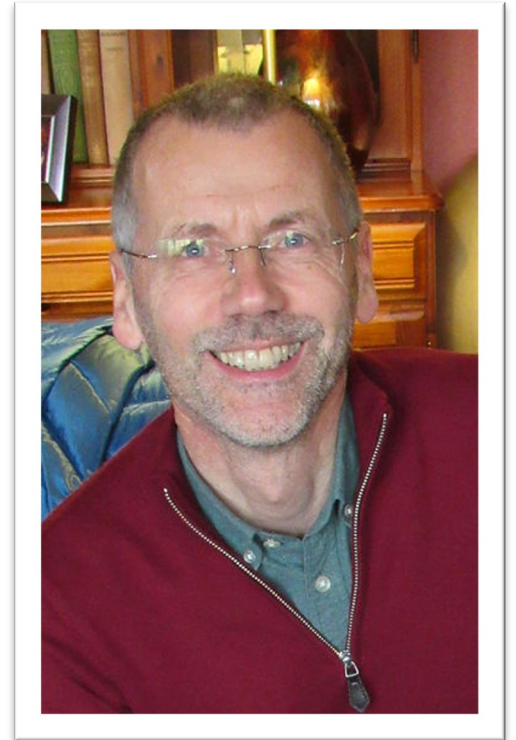
now,
we are not casual bystanders;

now
we are Lazarus

waiting . . .

Thom M. Shuman

*(*a pericope is a passage of scripture)*



Jesus commanded Lazarus to 'come out!' We're being asked to 'stay in'. In so many ways our circumstances are different from his and yet, perhaps it's true that 'we are now Lazarus'.

When it comes to staying in, some of us have nice homes and gardens to withdraw into; we have supportive people around us; the NHS is there if we need it. But it's still hard: we're worried about buying the things we need, wondering how long it will go on for and where it will end. And we still have to face all the challenges that were there before: family issues, ill health, caring for others.

But for some people, there's a sense of life closing in, family tensions boiling over, livelihoods lost, not being able to pay the bills, losing loved ones.

For all of us, we long to hear the words, 'Come out!'

When I hear the story of the raising of Lazarus, I think of happier times, May 2017 to be precise, when I visited Lazarus' tomb on a Holy Land pilgrimage. Look at the two photographs recording that visit to Bethany. In one photo, three wise men (other descriptions are possible!) stand outside the entrance to the tomb. The second photo shows the other side of the narrow street with the shopkeeper allowing our group to stand in the shade as we listened to the Gospel story being read.



Bethany is a poor community. It's less than two miles from Jerusalem on the other side of the Mount of Olives. For Jesus and his disciples it was a place of quiet retreat. Now it is cut off from the city by the 5-metre-high concrete security wall and impoverished as a result. Tourism is a vital source of income especially for Palestinian Christians.

With the arrival of coronavirus, the tourists have gone. Palestinians cannot cross the security wall to work. Health care is inadequate. Many families fear they will become destitute. Jesus wept then and I'm sure he weeps today.

We are quite naturally concerned about how the coronavirus pandemic will affect us and our loved ones. For us to 'come out' of this crisis one vital ingredient is to keep on caring about others. As Archbishop Justin Welby said in his broadcast service: 'Don't succumb to the temptation to pull up the drawbridge.' Support your neighbour in your street and support your neighbour across the world.

Our resources are limited, we can't support every good cause, we have to choose. But we mustn't retreat into ourselves, we have to reach out with love and generosity to others. Together we can look forward to the day when we hear the words: 'Come out!'

If anyone would like details of charities supporting Christians in the Holy Land, please contact me. Information about one charity can be found at www.friendsoftheholylan.org.uk/home.

A prayer

Jesus, friend of Lazarus, Mary and Martha,
when I have to wait, enfold me in your love;
when I need to act, prompt me;
when I need help, give me the grace to receive from others.
Thank you for the love you have for your friends
in all circumstances.
Thank you that you are the resurrection and the life
now and always.
Amen.