

March 29, 2020

About a week ago I read a story about a species that was thought to be extinct that has made a comeback. The article called this a “Lazarus Effect”.

However, in our current worldwide situation, I think we are experiencing a very different Lazarus Effect.

Lazarus, we are told, spent four days in the tomb before Jesus brought him back to life. What might those days have been like?

- He was trapped and isolated in the dark
- He could see no end in sight for that sense of being trapped and isolated
- He had no idea of what was going on in the world outside
- or of what was going to happen to him

Our shared worldwide human experience in these days of the COVID-19 pandemic is like none other in history. Like Lazarus, we are experiencing a profound isolation and its effects on us:

As a priest in a what is currently a one-person rectory, I am isolated at home by myself, but all of us are experiencing the stresses that come from this prolonged isolation:

- Many older people are living alone, some for many of them the effects of isolation are made worse by not having access to the means of modern communication that so many of us have come to rely on so much these days
- There are also many seniors who live in rest homes or retirement homes who must stay in their apartments rather than be part of the community that they chose to join

- Some people have been diagnosed as positive with the virus and are isolated at home or in the hospital from family and friends and are overwhelmed with fear for themselves and those they love
- Families with children at home full-time are stressed with trying to teach their kids, entertain them, plan their days and deal with the effects of being stuck at with each other 24/7
- Many of them are overwhelmed with having to plan each day in great details, with the lack of personal space even in relatively large homes, and with all the uncertainty that plagues us—No wonder one parent in Napa told a reporter that on Tuesday she was so stressed she just broke down and cried
- Some parents are trying to do all of these things and work from home at the same time
- Some parents are still going out to work and struggle to find someone to help their children with the schoolwork that's part of distance learning
- Some parents were just getting used to being empty-nesters and suddenly have their adult children home again, many of them trying to do distance learning for college
- Some of you work in essential services, especially first responders and medical personnel, who are struggling with the demands of working full time to help the rest of us and caring for their own families
- Some of you are suffering from other chronic or serious physical medical issues, and you're struggling with reduced access to the service, supplies and medications you need
- Some of you already have mental health issues such as depression and anxiety that are exacerbated by the current situations and you only have remote or virtual access your therapists and other professionals you rely on

- Many people have lost their jobs or had their hours severely curtailed and are fearful about their families' financial future
- Many business owners, especially those with small businesses, are worried about the future of their life's work, as well as their own financial security
- Many of you have had your plans for happy events such as weddings, graduations and the upcoming birth of a child thrown into disarray, and people who have had someone close to them pass away recently cannot even plan a fitting farewell with family and friends

THIS IS OUR CURRENT LAZARUS REALITY:

- We are not looking back on the story after rising from the dead
- We are in the long, dark and uncertainty isolation of Lazarus' four days in the tomb, not know when or even if he would rise from the dead

HOWEVER, WE KNOW THERE IS MORE TO THE STORY THAN LAZARUS WAS AWARE OF

- Even though Lazarus was isolated and in the dark, not knowing what his future held, Jesus was on his way to call him back to life and to set him free from fear and anxiety.
- Jesus takes away the stone behind which Lazarus is trapped:
 - the stone that has plunged him into darkness,
 - into isolation,
 - into uncertainty, anxiety and fear
- and Jesus invites Lazarus out into the fresh air and light, where those who love him wait to be reunited with him.

But we are different from Lazarus in one important way.

Already we can see slivers of light beginning to banish the darkness. Here in our Napa community and beyond we see

- People donating to medical equipment drives
- Teachers shifting to distance learning with creativity
- Restaurants adding take-out and delivery, and not just for prepared food but for other groceries basic supplies
- Businesses that supply restaurants shifting to selling their goods to the public and delivering to those who can't go out
- Drive-by birthday parties
- Zoom trivia nights
- Virtual Proms
- Parents and children working on home projects, like the father and ten-year-old son near me who have been working together all week to dig up a huge tree root that was tearing up their driveway
- Food banks getting very innovative in how to avoid cross contamination
- Essential services and businesses finding creative ways to both stay open and to protect their employees and customers
- People connecting to family and friends (often far away) using new means or means that are new to them
 - Shout out to my sister Nessa watching this Mass from isolation with her family in Cornwall, England

Even with all these slivers of light shining through, we still recognize the shared fear and anxiety that comes to all of us in many different guises depending on our specific circumstances of darkness and isolation.

Thinking of that same fear that comes in so many ways, last Thursday Pope Francis said the following:

“Each of us knows what their own fears are. We pray to the Lord that He might help us to trust, to tolerate and to conquer those fears.

And so, I pray:

- Lord Jesus, take away from our world the stone of this pandemic, and call your brothers and sisters of the entire human family forth from our shared darkness, fear and anxiety. Help us to care for one another each day, so that, like Lazarus, at your command, we may be untied and let go. May we walk together into the fresh air and sunlight that only your love can give us.

Announcements:

1. Thank you for continued contributions being dropped off to the rectory, being mailed in or through We Share on the parish website.
2. Please check website and Facebook page for latest resources and information, especially as we prepare to begin our virtual Holy Week next Sunday
3. Thanks for all the nice comments last week. This week, please post:
 - a. Examples of the ways that people are helping others that represent the slivers of light shining into our shared darkness
 - b. Prayer intentions that all of us can pray for during the week ahead