

SERMON EXILE – THE OLD HAS PASSED THE NEW HAS COME

It was only last Sunday, that I said, we now live in a profoundly different world. Not realising that just 7 days later even that ‘new’ reality would no longer exist. The old has passed, the ‘new’ has come, again.

No wonder, that all of us are having our anxiety buttons pressed in different ways and on a many, different levels.

And as I’ve journeyed this dizzying 7 days from the old to the new.

A few things have struck me quite forcibly.

Firstly, the internet and Social media often get a bad rap and of course it has its dark side. But can you imagine how isolated we’d all feel now without it. It’s a gift of connection. Have you ever known a time, when everyone in the world is probably having exactly, the same conversation every single day?

And what we’re seeing right now, is just how much we desire and need human connection. Balcony-parties- people finding creative ways to reach out across the great isolation divide. Connection and a sense of belonging to community, is the lifeblood of our well-being.

The 2nd thing that struck me was this sobering thought.

As we stare at the stark realisation, that one tiny microscopic virus has brought the world to its knees. Can we really afford to be indifferent to our responsibility and connection to nature anymore?

Am I the only one wondering, if this whole crisis is about an exhausted planet crying out “enough”?

Mother Nature’s way of reminding us, that we’ve taken the gift of our finely tuned eco system for granted for too long.

The 3rd thing that struck me, was this image.



This is the image we have up in our church for the season of Lent. This is Jesus Christ in the wilderness. For 40 days and nights, in complete self-isolation. No family, no local supermarket. **Just Jesus alone, facing a huge time of trial and testing.**

ISN'T THIS EXACTLY WHERE THE WORLD IS AT... RIGHT NOW.

If any good is to come out of this Corona virus catastrophe. It's that all of us, in this period of isolation and complete breakdown of life as we knew it, takes time to pause and reflect. To re-think how we do this thing called humanity.

THE BIG QUESTION this virus has put right before the world's eyes is this.

When this all passes, and this new paradigm becomes the old paradigm ...

How will we all be changed by the experience?

What will we have learned about ourselves? Individually, as society, as a world.

And I came across these profound and provocative words from Johnathan Sacks, the now retired Chief Rabbi from the UK. That cuts to the heart of these questions

This is the nearest we as humanity have had to a REVELATION.

**We've been coasting along for 50 years in the West,
with unprecedented freedom, affluence and optimism.**

**But now in a matter of months, we are suddenly faced with the fragility and vulnerability
of our human situation.**

**At the end of the day, whether you have a faith, or none, we now have to realise
that either we work together and survive, or work separately, and perish.**

We are faced with the inescapable truth of our interlinked humanity.

The thing that makes each of us, not only an 'I', but that we are also part, of the greater 'WE'.

WHEN I READ THOSE WORDS I THOUGHT, YESTHIS FOR ME IS THE NUB OG THINGS.

Interesting that our scripture verse of the day, from the Book of Proverbs tells us this...

**She, meaning [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who hold onto wisdom, are called blessed
if ever there was a time for deep wisdom to be embraced, it's now!**

If a painful blessing, is to come out of this crisis, it has to be the realisation, that we can no longer afford to keep operating separately. We rightly treasure, the sacredness of our individuality, but it does have to be in balance with the truth, that we are part of the greater 'WE'

It seems to me, that for far too long, the balance hasn't been right.

Even our Christian worship songs focus way too much on the 'I' and not enough on the 'WE'. Listen to the words.

Have we focussed too much on our individual *rights* and not enough on our collective *responsibility*, at the expense of our common good? Because what we're now discovering ... is that without collective responsibility, our individual rights begin to disappear.

And this brought me back to this haunting image.



Jesus went into the wilderness to define and get clear in his own heart and mind, exactly what his message of wisdom for humanity was... and what it would look like to live this out. He called this message the Kingdom of God. It's vision of hope for humanity.

He basically came to say... listen everyone, the way you keep doing things, isn't working out very well. It's time for a re-boot. Change direction. Change your mindset. The biblical word is 'repent'.

Re-write the broken human story.

Well now we have golden opportunity to attempt this.

But this can only happen, if we embrace a deep wisdom.

And it's the wisdom Jesus gives us in the FIRST BEATITUDE.

He tells us this. "You're blessed when you are poor in Spirit."

There are moments that come along in life for all of us, when the wheels fall off.

When everything we took for granted – everything we thought was for certain – everything we thought we had control of, suddenly gets stripped away.

We feel exposed, vulnerable and anxious.

Just like the world feels right now.

But if we look deep enough, there can be a blessing, an opportunity in these times.

Because crisis, can open us up to a spirit of humility and a willingness to learn.

To take a long and hard look at ourselves and re-think our values.

Because now there's less of us, and more room for God's spirit and wisdom to speak into our lives.

This why Jesus says we're blessed

And there's a very good reason why this the first teaching of the Beatitudes.

Because humility and opening ourselves up to God's Spirit, is always our starting point for new beginnings

We have a real opportunity to embrace the humility and wisdom needed ... to live a new vision of hope. The sacred 'I' in balance with the Greater 'WE'. And for us as followers of Christ, the call is always the same. To be the salt and light of the 'Christ way' and the beautiful qualities of the Beatitudes. Instruments of Peace, mercy and justice.

I'll finish with this FINAL THOUGHT

I believe, there are 2 crucial things about this WORLD crisis ... that are different from the past and can speak into our hope.

We've had world wars before. Tragic, life changing and far more horrific than now.

But when countries emerged from the conflict, the world still splintered off into factions of self-interest. Because wars are about us, fighting **each other**. We still didn't grasp the Greater "WE"

But this is different. It isn't about fighting each other.

This is about all the countries of the world, simultaneously fighting the same threat and facing the same challenge. An opportunity to realise, that we are ALL part of the greater WE.

We've also had world pandemics before.

But because of technology and the internet, we are more connected than ever before.

Which means we can ask the same crucial questions, *together*.

We can work out what it might look like, for all of us ... to re-write the broken human story, together, *as part of the greater WE*.

I'll leave you with these beautiful words from Kitty O'Meara.

Keep these in mind this week as you reflect on what it might look like for you, to emerge from this period of isolation, changed.

And the people stayed home.

**They read books, and listened, and rested,
and exercised, and made art.**

**They played games, and learned new ways of being,
and were still. They listened more deeply.**

Some meditated, some prayed, some danced.

Some met their shadows.

And the people began to think differently.

**In the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways,
the earth began to heal.**

**"And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again,
they grieved their losses, made new choices, dreamed new images.
They created new ways to live and to heal the earth fully,
as they too, had been healed.**