

PRESBYTERAL SYNOD

Thursday 19th March 2020

Facebook Live by Revd Leslie Newton

Transcript of Leslie's message:

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord" they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" John 11: 32-37

I've been reflecting on the impact of these last few days for us all. I'm coming to realise more and more forcefully that we need to recognise the suspension of worship and church activities, as something akin to a bereavement. Of course, the suspension is only temporary, and some form of normality will be re-established in due course. But nonetheless, the sudden loss of not being able to meet up as normal, the loss of our precious places and means of spiritual nourishment and care, is deeply significant.

So far, I've been busy encouraging us all to rise to the challenge of 'being church' in new ways when we cannot, for now 'go to' church.' Thank you for all that you're doing to find new ways to connect the body, and to serve the world. It's so important that we continue to fulfil Our Calling and to obey the Great Commandments.

But... it is only day 3. And, as I say, I reflect that perhaps I haven't yet given enough attention to just needing to recognise the painfulness of loss from the usual patterns of connecting and relating. We need to come to terms with this loss. To sit with it, and to allow our future paths to be shaped in the light (or perhaps I should say darkness) of this loss.

In the verses leading up to our reading from John 11, Jesus had already assured Martha that Lazarus would rise again. Nevertheless, in these few verses, we see Jesus pausing, being 'deeply moved in spirit and troubled' and then....weeping. However temporary these days may be, we must still face the pain of the loss: the sense of bereavement and grief.

So, on this day when Presbyters should have now been gathered in Acomb to share together as partners in ministry, it's right that we pause to take seriously this sense of loss; the loss being felt by many in our churches and communities. Albeit temporary; but nonetheless real. To be acknowledged, lived with and gently worked through.

Time enough yet for creativity and imagination – and the more the better! For our communities are still only beginning to see all kinds of loss and worry and pain. And we are called to be 'salt and light', 'grace and truth', 'love and more love.' The world needs our loving service and faithfulness.

But for now, humbly we pause – apart and yet together - before God, our hearts deeply moved and troubled. And we pray for God's grace to sustain us in our loss, and to help us walk sensitively and gently the path of our Lord Jesus, the path of self-giving suffering, the only way that leads to new life and new hope for us and for the world.