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Monday 07 April, 2020

REFLECTION

One of the comments from yesterday's reflection on worship was, should the real question be, *Does the message of Easter change how we worship God?* I couldn't agree more with the comment. Easter changes everything, in a significantly greater measure than commentators today, including Henry Kissinger, who say the Corona Virus will significantly change the foundation of our social and economic system.

As I write this, news has just broken that our Prime Minister has been taken into Intensive Care at St Thomas' Hospital, near Downing Street. We join with many others at this time, praying for his recovery, that he would overcome this ravaging virus, and would soon be back at the helm of government.

Top of the news over the past several weeks has been the number of the people infected by the Corona Virus, and the number of people dying as a result of COVID-19. Very little is mentioned about the number of people recovered and leading normal lives. There seems to be a greater fascination with death, than there is with life.

Death is one of two things least understood by the human mind, the other being *sin*. Much has been written on *death* and *sin* by people of all faiths in God, or **a** god, as well as those with no faith in any god, but outside of the Bible, there

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seems to be nothing definitive nor conclusive that is universally accepted on either subject.

Life is a mystery and an enigma. We live it in three dimensions: *yesterday* is gone and any memory of it could have been a dream, *tomorrow* offers promise of “better” and embodies hope, and the *present* is all we can touch, feel, hear and see, everything that is here and now.

Yesterday, today and tomorrow come together in the narrative of the family consisting of three siblings, Lazarus, Martha and Mary. By the absence of any mention, we deduce their parents were dead, the siblings were closely bonded to each other, and any relatives were not immediately accessible. They might have been a well-to-do family if one of their investments, the perfume *nard*, was valued at one year's wages for a labourer. We also know, they enjoyed a very close friendship with Jesus. Not only did they host a “dinner” for Him the night before His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, but it seems Jesus may have spent the last few days before his crucifixion, travelling daily into Jerusalem and back to Bethany, staying the night in Martha's home (Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:11-12).

Yesterday for the two sisters, was indeed a dream. Their brother Lazarus was unexpectedly taken ill. It was serious enough for the sisters to send word to Jesus: “*Lord, your friend is ill*”, following which he died. As Jesus did not arrive

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immediately, they took the decision to bury him. Jesus arrived four days after Lazarus' death, weeps with them and declares, *if you believe, you would see the glory of God.*

Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the grave and to the astonishment of the sisters and the crowd gathered, he does, still wrapped tightly in burial clothes.

All that was yesterday! It might as well have been a dream!

In the midst of "yesterdays" events, when Jesus arrived, Martha's conversation with Jesus conveys the promise of "better" and the embodiment of hope.

She greets Jesus with the words, *"Master, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you."* When Jesus declares Lazarus will be raised up, Martha replies, *"I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time."*

Even though Martha was "busy in the kitchen", she has heard and accepted everything Jesus was teaching Mary. She believed in Jesus' promise of "better" and placed her hope of resurrection at the end of time.

Jesus turns the reality of the hope she clings to, into the present. *"You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in Me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in Me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?"*

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We do not understand *death* because in our spirit, we struggle with the promise of better to come, a utopian eternity, with the reality of suffering and pain, grief and sorrow, here and now.

Jesus informs Martha, He **IS** both Resurrection (future hope) and Life (present **and** future reality), and He offers Martha a two-stage journey into future hope: first, *believe in Me* and the second, *live believing in Me*.

Jesus invites us to start by spending time with Him, in God's Word, to *believe in Him*. The evidence is found in God's Word; spending time in it, opens our eyes to Truth and Truth opens our minds to *believe in Him*.

It is this personal conviction to believe in Jesus the Christ that gives us the courage to **live** *believing in Him*.

The question to us every day, is the question Jesus asked Martha, *Do **YOU** believe this?*

If we do, can we say with Martha, *“Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world.”* ?

AMEN.