Passion Sunday 2020

Today at Mass we read the whole of the Passion story, from the Last Supper to Jesus yielding up his spirit on the Cross.

Most of you who read this last sentence will know what I mean. Let’s remember the generation among us who haven’t the slightest idea what I am referring to. Yet all of us have known or will know what it is suffer the loss of someone we care for deeply and what it means to live with their new and strangely endless absence. I spoke this morning with a friend whose father died suddenly of a heart attack. She and her mother, who joined us on WhatsApp, have been transported in the few minutes that it took for their beloved father and husband to die, into a different world. There are very few words that one can say to those who are so fresh in grief. It is easier to speak of cosmic mysteries than personal loss. Yet the simple, caring presence of others in times when life has been upended and turned inside out can prevent us from collapsing or going mad.

As we see just how far-reaching is influence of this sudden pandemic and how it has stopped the world so suddenly, sending shuddering shocks through every aspect of our lives, the need for personal connection has never been more precious. Here at Bonnevaux the regular rhythm of our daily life, meditation, work, reading, conversation and friendship sustains us as we try to share the gift of a spiritual practice with others around the world through online events and messages. This morning I met meditated online with the workforce of

Singapore’s DPA Architects – who are overseeing the renovation of Bonnevaux - from their offices around the world from Shanghai to London. The Contemplative Path programme website will be up online shortly.

In our new slowed down, shut in world the way we oscillate between the global and the local has never been more obvious. Whether browsing or talking online or walking into the next room or the garden we feel how we are creatures who exists because we are connected, or seek connection, or grieve lost connections. We live on presence not on bread alone.

Suddenly losing what makes us flourish punches the breath out of us. Because it hurts, we may think we have done something to deserve it or feel picked on by an alien force. We also feel dis-illusioned because we took for granted that things would stay as they were for as long as we needed them that way. No blame in feeling this. It’s weird but eventually it makes some sort of sense.

But then there is the banality of grief. The suddenness of the loss is melodramatic, climactic. But climaxes slow down to routines of living with loss, more slow-moving, dull-ache sadness This is when we most need a path, a practice that gives hope through experiencing connection to an eternal spring of being in us. This is the dawning of the age of Resurrection.

This is the meaning of the Holy Week (whether you know what that means or not) that we begin today. Here at Bonnevaux, we would be happy to share that with you online, day by day, connected. [(www.wccm.org)](http://www.wccm.org/)

**Monday of Holy Week**

Here at Bonnevaux I have a great view from the window of my study. It looks out on the lake and the valley leading down to what we have named the Resurrection Tree. This is the old oak where we lit the Easter fire on Holy Saturday night last year for the first time. We hope to do the same again, the same ritual in a very different world, in a few days. I’ll see if we can put a picture of this view and the tree on [Daily Wisdom](https://www.wccm.org/content/daily-wisdom-archives) for today.

As the weather is warming up and the trees are greening rapidly, I am opening the window more often as I write here. As I did this just now I saw one of the Bonnevaux cats prowling around looking for prey. It looked up at me and emitted a pathetic mew and then resumed its search. On the lake the frogs are working up to their springtime love-making with great noise and sudden silences. The birdsong has become more 3-D. All animals, even the creepy centipede that frightened me when I went to the kitchen last night, are our friends. We need their companionship as well as our human friends. Perhaps we will treat both better from what we are learning in solitude these days.

Through the fresher, cleaner air after the reduced pollution, come waves of new scents. Our friend, the natural world, is able to share itself with us and remind us how we belong - together - to something greater.

Today’s gospel story opens with a dinner among friends, Jesus, Martha and Mary. Their brother Lazarus had been raised from the dead. Like all those raised, restored and resurrected, he was restored to this same life of companionship, knowing where we belong, but in a new way. He’s at the dinner too.

Mary brings into the room some very expensive ointment, pure nard. It grows in the Himalayas of China, Nepal and India. When I was in Israel a few weeks ago I was given a small tube of it and have just smelled it again. It is amber-coloured and used for medicine, incense (in the Temple in Jerusalem) and as perfume – three purposes with connected meanings.

Mary used this precious thing to anoint the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The four gospels tell the story with variations. In Luke, for example, the woman is a sinner, often taken to mean a prostitute. Anointing of the feet was a gesture of respect, although the detail of the hair is different and unusual. In John’s version Judas, reducing mystery and ritual to the material level, complains at the extravagance. Jesus defends the woman, connecting it to the day of his burial, which we know will be only too soon. These different accounts create a sense of uncertainty, the impossibility of rational precision: a transition period approaching a climax and new time.

Uncertainty – such as we are experiencing now in this pandemic – can also be richly mysterious and meaningful. If we know how to live with uncertainty and open to mystery we may smell the meaning, as they people in the story smelled the scent of the nard filling the whole house.