

Letters from Lockdown

Hi everybody,

Greetings from Rapunzel's tower. The idiom of letting one's hair down is symbolic of relaxing and feeling 'at home'. but after a while this can lose its attraction and home becomes a little stifling and unsettling.



It is interesting to examine the scriptural account of what, physically, may have happened to the followers of Jesus in the days that followed his death. It seems as if at least one narrative says that they confined themselves to the 'upper room' in prayer, discussion and expectation. They were, in all possibility, confused, expectant, fearful and unsure of what was coming next.

Rohr uses a word that has become quite popular lately – '*Liminal*'. It comes from the Latin root word "limen," which means 'threshold'... Sheryl Fullerton writes:

"We are, as the anthropologist Victor Turner (1920–1983) wrote, betwixt and between. In that space—which is mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual—we are destabilized, disoriented. The old touchstones, habits, and comforts are now past, the future unknown. We only wish such a time to be over. We may be impatient to pass through it quickly, with as little distress as possible, even though that is not likely. . . ."

This feeling is not just individualised but part of our socio-political matrix, affecting communities and belief systems all over the world. Yet it is precisely in this *liminal* space that the Holy Spirit moves. In those times of unsettled, unbalanced reaching out into the darkness, we enter the liminal paradox: that as we are stripped of our pretences and defences, we are forced to trust (like the parable of Jonah in the belly of the whale) even *without* our feelings, convictions and spiritual sensations. Just as Jeremiah is given the mandate to... "*pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant...*" so

too we enter the desert road, the wilderness and discover (as Jacob did) *"surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!"* It is what St John of the Cross called 'The dark night of the soul' and it is from within this space that we find the 'I Am'. As Paul puts it: *"I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*

This is a time in which God is moving within the world, not in easy answers and glib prophesies, but within the awareness of many people and their 'liminal' spaces. We are not sure of where it will go, what shore we will wash up on, what the Church will become and many other questions. Let us persevere in the darkness of unknowing, confident of one thing – that it is not in our 'finding' of God but in God's finding of us that our deliverance lies.

In the meantime, I note the reactions of our leaders and politicians, some of whom claim to see in the darkness. I am reminded of the old saying (attributed to a number of sources):

He who knows not and knows not that he knows not- is a fool; avoid him.

He who knows not and knows that he knows not- is a student; teach him.

He who knows and knows not that he knows- is asleep; wake him.

He who knows and knows that he knows- is a wise man;

follow him.

(Attributions: Persian apothegm, Sanskrit Saying)

Till the next time I let my hair down, or my beard grows...

Leigh