

The last couple of weeks have felt a little crazy. Having quite a large introverted side to my personality, I thought that if we had to stay in our houses, I would be fine. After all, having time to think, pray and recharge by myself are things that are very necessary for my personality type.

But what I've realised is that when all of a sudden we are in lockdown and the simple things and pleasures that we are so used to are taken away, life can feel quite dark.

On top of this, when I was writing this the latest figures had just been released to the public, and we had reached a very heavy milestone in the loss that many families are suffering across our country.

Most of us in this country are in mourning at the moment. We are all suffering losses of very different kinds. Whether it is our freedom of movement, routine or in the worst cases people.

Many of us might be tempted to think a bit like Martha in this morning's reading. When Jesus arrives, she bounds up to him and asks him a very painful question in the form of a statement. 'Lord, if you were here my brother would not have died.' In other words, 'Lord, where were you? Why did you leave us in this situation – you could have done something about it!'

And how many of us feel like that at the moment? Lord, where are you – you can do something about this, why aren't you here doing something about this.

But Martha at least knows who it is she's talking to. She knows that despite her brother having been gone for days, Jesus is someone that she can have faith in. She knows that there is a time when all those who God has redeemed will rise again.

And then Jesus says one of the seven 'I am' sayings in John. 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

It's not that he was the resurrection and the life, it's not that he will be in the future. Right now, where Martha is Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life.

And yes, there is a wider picture here of the Christian hope beyond the grave, but that's not what Jesus is telling Martha. Right now, where they both stand, Jesus is the one who brings life. It's actually a fairly common theme in John's Gospel, that where he goes 'life' appears. It may not be that wherever Jesus walks dead people come back to life, but where he goes people are changed; things happen!

And it's worth stopping and thinking about. Because what this means for us as Christians is that in the midst of our darkness, Jesus comes to us to bring life.

Where we are now in our society, with all the darkness around us, it would be all too easy for us to get dragged into ways of thinking that are not life giving to us.

We might all be under instruction to stay in our homes, but that does not mean that we are to stop living. We are called to have life wherever we are. There's a challenge there for all of us.

The other thing I love in this passage is as Jesus approached the tomb. And here we get one of the most famous passages in the new testament. Verse 35, which simply states, 'Jesus wept'.

It's in many ways a wonderfully comforting thing to know that Jesus does not simply come to deal with our problems, but that he understands them on a deep level. He weeps and knows the pain that that is within the community.

And Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. And the things that trouble us now are things that God is not absent from. He understands our fears, our sadness and our longing for things to be as they were.

And there will be an end to this crisis. We will come out the other side. But I strongly believe that God is saying you don't have to wait for the end of this to find me and find the life that I want to gift to you. It's something that you can have right now!

And it's so vital that we have that life now. Because it shapes who we are. It influences the ways in which we deal with each other – especially in those households where larger families might have to spend more time with one another! They will need that life to translate into a deep wellspring of joy in this time.

But also, for those who are living alone. That wellspring of joy will need to be there too. It will be something that brings peace and strength in a time that will be testing!

And having that life is also important because now more than ever we need to be the body of Christ in our community. We might not be able to gather together as we are used to at the moment, but while we might not be able to open the building, the church is not shut – the church is open for business.

We need to find ways to stay connected. Obviously, I'm talking to you through one medium, but there are so many other ways we can be the church. You can pick up the phone and talk to those members who won't be able to join us here online, you could keep an eye on someone in our community who might be vulnerable and self-isolating.

Most importantly, we can pray. I'd encourage all of you to adopt a good pattern of prayer at any time of the year, but in this season it's more important than ever.

Pray, and listen for God's voice. Listen to him say 'I am', and in line with this morning's passage, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'

Lazarus didn't stop being Lazarus when he was inside the tomb. And the church won't stop being the church just because we have been unable to gather.

There will be a time, when like Lazarus, we will re-enter the world from the tomb of our lockdown, and it will be when the time's right.

But when we do come out of the other side of this, we know that Jesus will be there, he may have to help us take the bandages off and dust us down. But we will know all along that in his presence, we will always have life.