

What Time Is It in Lockdown?

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [History](#),
[Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Here where I dwell in the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice has just occurred.

The darkest day of the year in a dark year.

A few days ago was also the Grand Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, which is interesting to those who like the musical Hair and believe their fates lie in the stars and not in themselves. Shakespeare's Cassius had it right: such astrological determinism is for underlings.

Free people agree with Beethoven:

"I will take fate by the throat; it will never bend me completely to its will."

Oppressors have always wanted people to believe their lives are fated, that they live in a prison and there is no escape. It is the key to successful slavery. Many institutionalized religions have promoted such a belief, contradicting their founders' messages of freedom. So have secular ideologies. There is nothing you can do, so rollover with Beethoven; it's hopeless. "Do what you're told," as the great wise leader Anthony Fauci has said.

But a much wiser Kris Kristofferson sang:

Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose.

Didn't Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor say to Jesus in his cell in the gloomy vaulted prison:

We will show them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. They will become timid and look to us and huddle close to us in fear, as chicks to the hen. They will marvel at us and will be awe-stricken before us, and will be proud at us being so powerful and clever, that we have been able to subdue such a turbulent flock of thousands of millions.

They will do as they are told and reject the freedom Jesus brought, "for nothing has been more insupportable for a man and a human society than freedom," drones the Inquisitor. They will do as they are told. And the prisoner was silent.

As the year comes to an end and another begins, the contemplation of time, its passing, the days gone by and days to come, the new year, resolutions, and how to "keep safe" occupy

many minds as governments across the world continue to impose lockdowns on their people that are creating suffering on a vast, unimaginable scale.

“Every ruling minority,” wrote the late great John Berger, “needs to numb and, if possible, to kill the time-sense of those whom it exploits. This is the authoritarian secret of all methods of imprisonment.”

There is time for you and time for me is the mantra of all authoritarians. We set the clocks to slow or fast. You follow. Alternating rhythm to keep you guessing. When things are kind of slow, we'll give you 5G speed as we reset your future to the online life. Everything will be so fast that you won't know whether you are coming or going or just running in place.

Slow is for prisoners around the world. Here in the United States, the world leader in incarceration, there are more than 2 million people caged in such hell holes. Doing time. Very slow time.

For those on the outside, a year ago, permanent busyness and speed were the norm. Everyone was so frantic and rushing in the maddening crowd of a consumer and cell phone frenzy, driven by an unseen nanosecond digital dictator. Now the lockdown has brought a taste of boredom, slow time, and anxious waiting for the day the authoritarians will give the word that the new normal has arrived and the children can fling the doors open and run out to play. But they will have to learn the new rules of the game. Same game, but Built Back Better. Better for the bosses.

Forget that criminal born in a manger. Getting there is a long and hard journey. We are in lockdown. Just do as you are told.

Or imagine that child as a grown man in a prison cell in Seville 15 centuries later.

Or in Bethlehem today, in the West Bank as Palestinian territory is inexorably disappeared by the Israeli government and Palestinians' places to dwell on this earth grow smaller and smaller as their houses are bulldozed and land stolen.

Imagine the fates of all those locked down shut-in abandoned ones, those who are doing time to the slow ticking of the clocks. Or those who have no time to escape the supersonic hum of drone-launched missiles. Those whose time is up because the authorities deem it so. Those who just won't do what they are told.

In lockdown, there is plenty of time to imagine.

Thomas Merton, the inspirational anti-war Trappist monk, in “The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room” in *Raids on the Unspeakable*, said this about that child in a manger, soon to be radical anti-war criminal executed by the state:

Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ comes uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst.

Their numbers are growing by the day.

Pundits are fond of saying that time is all we have. This is untrue. We don't have time; time has us. We are born into it and in a techno-clock world those clocks start ticking and we turn with the seasons until our turning stops and our time is up. It comes with being born, being mortal. Human. We don't need astrology to tell us this. We don't want authoritarians controlling our experience of this greatest of mysteries.

If you listen closely, you can hear waves of empty words tumbling through the world, whistling windy words saying nothing. Whining words, nodding heads, vacuous sayings. Media saturated fatuous words. About "time" more clichés have been coined and more quotable quotes recorded than nearly any other word. Quotes about what no one knows.

Time stands still, time flies, time is up, time is on your side, time is short, time is long, who knows where the time goes, time out, time starts, stop the clocks, start the clocks, we're running out of time, clock in, clock out, time served, serving time, lacking time, losing time, having time, gaining time, the end of time.

Yet everyone knows what time is even though they can't tell you. It comes with the territory of existing. Like silence, like love, like peace, like truth – simple gifts that authoritarians invert to suit their evil designs. Twisted people twisting words.

And yet:

It is no different now.
The yearning still gnaws.
The night dark, utterly silent,
Sky stretched endlessly back
Into an infinity beyond reach.
And the fears, the tears
Are they any different?

It is no different now.
Joy sometimes, hope too, divisions
Seemingly unbridgeable, vast chasms
Opening between those closest.
Little changes, though two thousand years
Dissolve into oblivion behind us.

It is no different now.
Plus ça change,
Plus c'est la même chose.
Always the same.

Yet a word is heard dimly
Laboring out of the deafening black
Silence, almost but not inaudible.
And the angel says, "Go out,"
And the angel said, "Go out,"
Always the angel, always the voice
Bearing us up along the way

(If you do not turn to the inner light,
Where will you turn?), always calling:
"Journey far through strange country,
Follow the light you barely see
But which is the light of your life.
Follow it across the desert of your heart
Where wild beasts seek to devour you.
There is no time, there is no time
To hesitate. Now is the star's hour,
Now you are called on a fool's journey
Into a pig's pen and a child's strange
And glorious presence." Thus speaks the angel
Again and again, no matter how dark
The darkest day, nothing changes.

It is no different now.
Now as always is the star's hour.
Now as then a star is born to men
To lead us on. A light that darkness
Cannot overcome, despite us.

Love is not a sometimes thing,
Though we abuse it like the earth.
It is all we have to hold us up,
And it always will.

A star is always born.

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