

Sunday March 29th 2020
5th Sunday of Lent
PASSIONTIDE BEGINS

Sadly we are no longer able to open our church buildings. The good news is that we can still join together in worship by using this readings and reflection sheet and the order of service in own homes or connecting online at 10am on Sunday March 29th 2020. We have a new YouTube channel where services and videos of many types will be broadcasted. If you have internet access (you don't need a YouTube account), the link can be found on the homepage of our website (www.missioncommunity.org) along with an order of service for simple communion and also morning and evening prayer resources provided by Exeter Diocese.

Love and Prayers for you all, Andrew

Collect:

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

The word of God

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.'

Romans 8: 6-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Gospel

John 1: 1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, * said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus * had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles * away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. * Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, * the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly

disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

A Reflection from Hillarie Griggs, Reader in the Beacon Parishes

We are living through strange and unprecedented times. We have entered a time full of uncertainty, anxiety and fear. Not only health and lives have been affected by Covid-19, but livelihoods and incomes. We have lost our feeling of stability and security. So much of what was normal has been stopped including visiting our family and friends. Everything we took for granted has been temporarily taken away from us. We are learning a new way of living. We even have new vocabulary entering our everyday language, self isolation and social distancing. It is with this in the background I reflected on today's gospel reading.

While reading through this passage these were the phrases that I noticed:

Lord, if you had been here.....

Martha meet Jesus with these words. This phrase could have been said in anger and as a criticism about the delay Jesus took to come to them? How many times have we felt like shouting at God for not coming to us when we want or need him most. We want him to intervene exactly as we want him to and when he doesn't it can leave us feeling disillusioned, perhaps even abandoned. We may even begin to wonder if God has stopped caring about us. Of course by faith we know that is not true.

If we read on to the next sentence Martha then adds "But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." What a statement of faith! Even at the tragic death of her brother Martha believed in Jesus. She didn't fully understand all his teaching but she still had faith. A great example of remaining faithful even when we fear the worst. We don't understand what this pandemic means for us but we do need to continue to have faith. We need to continue in our prayers, continue being the body of Christ even if we can no longer meet together in church on a Sunday.

Jesus wept.

At the sight of Mary weeping in uncontrollable grief Jesus weeps alongside her. Jesus had lost a dear friend and now another dear friend is heartbroken and he knows putting on a brave face is not possible or appropriate. Even though he knows that all will end well, he still weeps with her while she is suffering. He will also draw near to us in our struggles and

will share our pain. He promised to always be with us, and help us through it. He may simply hold us tight in his embrace and weep alongside us.

The raising of Lazarus from the tomb is a story about dying to one life and rising to a new one. I cannot imagine Lazarus forgetting that he died. We won't forget this crisis but we have seen a new way of living. We have seen examples of communities supporting each other. We have been forced to stop all that is familiar but this has also given us time to enjoy the early spring sunshine as many of us are spending time getting our gardens ready for the summer. During this time we could choose despair but we are called as Christians to be people of hope. In the words of Saint Teresa of Avila "Let nothing perturb you, nothing frighten you. All things pass. God does not change. Patience achieves everything."