**Sunday 29 March 2020**

**Fifth in Lent**

**Bible readings**

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

John 11:1-45

Centre yourself in God’s presence in whatever way works best for you – a lit candle, a time of silence or, maybe, breathing in “be” and out “still”.

When you’re ready, I invite you to say the following service out loud and slowly, letting the words sink deep into your being. Don’t rush from one section to the other – take time.

**I lift up my eyes to the hills –**

**where does my help come from?**

**My help comes from God,**

**the Maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121)**

**Hymn**

I know that my Redeemer lives What joy that blessed assurance gives!He lives, he lives, who once was dead;He lives, my everlasting head!He lives, to bless me with his love; He lives, to plead for me above;

He lives, my hungry soul to feed;He lives, to help in time of need.He lives, and grants me daily breath;He lives, and I shall conquer death;He lives, my mansion to prepare;He lives, to lead me safely there.

He lives, all glory to his name;He lives, my Saviour, still the same;What joy that blessed assurance gives,

I know that my Redeemer lives!

Samuel Medley (1738-1799)

**A Celtic Prayer**

As the light of dawn awakens earth’s creatures

and stirs into song the birds of the morning

so may I be brought to life this day.

Rising to see the light

to hear the wind

to smell the fragrance of what grows from the ground

to taste its fruit

and touch its textures

so may my inner senses be awakened to you

so may my senses be awakened to you, O God.

Amen

**A Prayer of Confession**

Loving God

I am very conscious of my vulnerability and my need. Forgive me that I have sometimes tried to go it alone and have ignored others in the process. Ignored those who are,

struggling to find food

struggling to find friends

struggling to make ends meet

struggling to cope

struggling to find you

Forgive me, renew me and help me to find ways of reaching out, maybe to just one person, at this time of national crisis. Thank you that technology allows me to do this from my own home – by phone or email or WhatApp. Help me to see in them the face of Jesus Christ. Inspire me to care for myself as well as others. Amen.

**Read John 11:1-45 (printed at the end of this service)**

This is a long passage! The sentiments of Martha in verse 21, “Lord, if you had been here….” are ones that are familiar to us, aren’t they? We easily slip into being, “If only” people, looking back and regretting or looking at where we are now and wishing things were different.

Martha was chiding Jesus – why didn’t you come earlier? If you had done so my brother wouldn’t have died. The danger for us in reading this passage is in thinking that its main point is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Incredible though that is, it is not John’s main point I don’t think. Well then, what is his main point?

John wants to shift belief in resurrection – new life in Christ - from only being in the future to being in the present; from something that happens only after we die to something that happens right here and right now. And so, Jesus builds on what Martha has said about resurrection “on the last day” (verse 24) and trumps it – **I am the resurrection**, he says. Now, right now.

In these unsettling times we are invited to draw confidence and hope from the one who is resurrection, who is new life for us now. What, for us now, are those shoots of hope, of thankfulness, of new perspectives, of deepening relationships, of being held by the God of the universe? And what are those things that hold us back, things from which we need to be unbound? (verse 44)?

It is interesting that for Lazarus to experience new life, members of the community had to unbind him. So, too, for we who make up the church, even though we can’t meet together. We, too, have a role in helping others experience the truth of Jesus Christ, the risen one, offering us renewal and love here and now. As Martha found, trusting in this way is not easy. However, in our context never has it been more important to hold on to these truths and find ways of helping others hold on, too.

**Prayers of Intercession (being used by Methodists nationwide today)**

Holy and Loving God we pray for your world, for the leaders who are making difficult decisions as every day brings new changes and challenges.

Lord of all, Lord for all

Hear our prayer

We pray for our nation, that decisions might be made with wisdom and care for the benefit of all.

Lord of all, Lord for all

Hear our prayer

We pray for our town/ city/ village. For all who live here that your peace might reign and that your perfect love might settle our fears.

Lord of all, Lord for all

Hear our prayer

We pray for frontline workers, Doctors, nurses, carers, shop workers, refuse collectors, postal workers.

Lord of all, Lord for all

Hear our prayer

We pray for our loved ones, those we know who may be ill, those who are struggling, those who are confused and conflicted… ( you might like to name names here)

Lord of all, Lord for all

Hear our prayer

And finally we pray for ourselves, you know what is on our hearts and minds, and so we offer that to you (again you might like to name your own prayers and concerns)

Lord of all, Lord for all

Hear our prayer

AMEN

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father ……

**The Blessing**

The vitality of God be mine this day

The vitality of the God of life.

The passion of Christ be mine this day

The passion of the Christ of love.

The wakefulness of the Spirit be mine this day

The wakefulness of the Spirit of justice

That I may be fully alive this day

That I may be fully alive. Amen.

**John 11:1-45**

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.