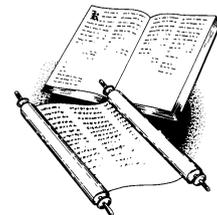


Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.

Sunday 22nd March 2026. Fifth Sunday in Lent.

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



**Call to Worship.** The Bible is our fifth Lenten symbol. Jesus was well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures and used many images recognisable to the people: vineyards, seed and sowers, sheep and shepherds. We forget at our peril that Jesus was a Jew, steeped in Judaism. He sought to open up the Scriptures in new and exciting ways, whilst remaining true to the faithful God revealed within them.

*He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:  
"The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor."*

**STF 470 Verse 2,**

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,  
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,  
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,  
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

**Prayer:** God of the Word, instil within us the  
discipline to read and study your Scriptures, the  
wonder in exploring your words afresh and the  
Spirit to aid our comprehension and discernment.  
**Amen**

**STF 137**

New every morning is the love  
our wakening and uprising prove;  
through sleep and darkness safely brought,  
restored to life and power and thought.

If on our daily course our mind  
be set to hallow all we find,  
new treasures still, of countless price,  
God will provide for sacrifice.

New mercies, each returning day,  
hover around us while we pray;  
new perils past, new sins forgiven,  
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

The trivial round, the common task,  
will furnish all we need to ask,  
room to deny ourselves, a road  
to bring us daily nearer God.

Only, O Lord, in thy dear love  
fit us for perfect rest above;  
and help us, this and every day,  
to live more nearly as we pray.

**Prayers of adoration and confession**

Lord God as we reflect upon creation and the promise of spring, we know you are a God of love and beauty. You are the God of rain and sunshine of plants and flowers. Honoured by wildlife. Praised by the Seasons. God, with all the Earth, we praise You. We sing with tongues of love and hope! Sustaining God, as life breathes in and out we emerge from the rest of the night. And as the birds have already greeted the dawn so, it is our turn to greet you, in delight and in beauty, and praise. For new every morning is your love and your mercies are endless. As we worship you bring us closer to our understanding and appreciation of your grace and mercy **Amen**

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we have chosen to harm: ourselves, others, the Earth. We have chosen and acted in our own authority and opportunity, we have gone along with it and kept quiet. We have left healing and peace-making to others. We have thrown away, where we might have repurposed and treated Creation as single-use and expendable. We have done what looked like good, and acted with what looked like prudence, without a scent of love.

We Pray that you will set us free from that self-deception, from the harm we think we have to do. Make us beautiful with Your forgiveness - make us as lights that shine and show the way, make us as water in the desert, make us as bright threads in life's web to receive with joy what we also need as partners with Creation. To Your glory, **Amen**

**Bible reading. John 11:1- 10**

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" Jesus

answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

### **Reflection**

We have a rather long passage of scripture today if we read the whole forty five verses of this seemingly familiar story about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. I have just included the first ten verses but there are many intriguing things happening and being said in the whole story that we might pass over without noticing. One wonders at the misunderstandings that happened throughout this passage?

I sometimes wonder about how things are said and portrayed and whether the way things are presented could be a little difficult to understand and even a bit quirky! When on holiday years ago in Hawaii we were taken on the tour to a beautiful cemetery with a replica Chinese pagoda and a well stocked koi carp lake. It was a beautiful parkland. Over looking the sea was a huge hoarding with a notice about, plots for sale with a beautiful sea view! Ironic, can the occupants of the plots see and enjoy the views? Ok probably the family visiting the grave would appreciate the views but really? Another 'grave' quirky quote came from the Reader's Digest that told of another huge hoarding that advertised the 2000 census happening in Texas. It said, 'stand up and be counted.' Sponsored by Rosewood cemetery!

In our bible passage we have a grave issue literally and we see the disciples questioning Jesus' decision to travel back to Judea to the home of the woman who had anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume and wiped them with her hair. Allusion's to the time when Jesus would be buried and of course some penance for the sins of her own life. It was an action that would cause one of the disciples to question why wasn't the costly perfume kept and sold to give gifts to the poor? Judas was the questioner and was he really thinking about the poor or lining his own coffers? We see Jesus' answer to the disciples questions about the safety of going back to Jerusalem which could be interpreted simply as we will travel in the daylight or was he cryptically speaking about the sins that are represented by the darkness? Early on in the story we see allusions to his death and resurrection and the raising of Lazarus. "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

There is a wealth of gems in this passage. Let's just hone in on a couple of things contained in verses 9-10. "Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." Let's think about this, 'Walking in darkness' and being woken up.

Walking in darkness. If you can choose would you really prefer to walk in darkness or daylight? Well obviously daylight. If you could follow a guide rather than stumble and make mistakes what would you choose? Think carefully? A simple example is flat pack furniture. How many people disregard the instruction leaflet and go their own way at making the furniture up and find the finished result is a bit of a mess? I still recall a record player cabinet I attempted to make and fortunately a friend was able to rectify and create some new holes so that the shelves and door fitted were they would have fitted had I followed the instruction leaflet! A typical harmless example of how we think we know best. There are a plethora of other ways we think we know best, shortcuts in life that won't do anyone any harm or will they? I wonder why Mary felt the weight of her sins so deeply in the presence of Christ? So much so that she would take two very costly items to lay at his feet, a woman's crowning glory, her hair and the perfume of considerable cost?

Let's break this verse up a little and look at it in more depth. **If anyone walks in the daytime,**

Walking in the daytime symbolises living in the light of God's truth and guidance. In biblical times, travel was safer during daylight, reflecting the spiritual safety found in following God's will. This imagery is consistent with other biblical references to light and darkness, such as in Psalm 119:105, where God's word is described as a lamp to one's feet. Our call to worship from the Lenten guide reminds us that Jesus, 'sought to open up the Scriptures in new and exciting ways, whilst remaining true to the faithful God revealed within them'. We have a guide and instruction book to keep us from all the mistakes we might make in life, if only we would get to know it and follow it .

**he will not stumble,**

Stumbling is often used metaphorically in Scripture to describe falling into sin or error. Walking in the light of God's truth prevents spiritual stumbling. This concept is echoed in 1 John 1:7, which speaks of walking in the light as He is in the light. We might say about someone, "they've fallen from grace. Which is a way of describing a significant loss of status, reputation, favour, or respect. We often use it about people in the public eye. We have had so many press releases about royal misdemeanour's and politicians failings in recent times. How many of us fall from grace but don't realise that we might not be in the public eye but we are never out of our Heavenly Father's sight. There used to be scary Victorian pictures hung over young people's beds saying something about 'the all seeing eye', probably referring to proverbs 15:3 "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good." Other images had an eye in a triangle. The triangle represents the trinity and the eye is reminding you that God is watching you! I much prefer George McClouds take on God watching incase we stumble. In one of his prayers from the Iona community he says something like this, "when we stumble and kick God in the teeth, he is concerned about whether we have stubbed our toes."

### **because he sees by the light of this world.**

The "light of this world" can be understood as the natural light provided by the sun, but it also points to Jesus Himself, who is described as the Light of the World in John 8:12. This dual meaning underscores the importance of both physical and spiritual illumination. We love natural light especially bright warm days when we can bask in the sunshine. It's a beautiful metaphor for Jesus Christ. Jesus, as the Light, provides guidance and clarity and the warmth of his love. When we walk in his light it will keep us from spiritual blindness and stumbling. Because He is the light of the world we are also acknowledging that the person who tries to live without Him will struggle, fall into sin, and lose their way. Without the guidance of God's truth, people make choices based on fear, confusion, or selfish desires. In contrast, those who follow Jesus have His light to guide them, even in those difficult times we all face.

Another key point is that fear often causes people to walk in darkness. The disciples were afraid to return to Judea because of the threat of violence. Their fear was understandable, but it was also keeping them from seeing the bigger picture. When I trained as a SCUBA diver we were taught about perceptual narrowing. In a stressful situation, and being underwater can be a stressful challenge, your vision becomes narrowed by fear and if you become stressed then it is quite possible not to see the simple solution's right in front of you. Your perception becomes distorted. When the world feels bleak and dim, we need to check if we are walking with Jesus in his light. Jesus was not afraid of what lay ahead because He trusted in His Father's plan. We can dispel our fears if we trust in him. Personally I warm to the disciples and I know I would have been worrying alongside them. "It's been two days since we heard about Lazarus, isn't he going to do something?" Would have been my thoughts too. Oh to stop with the worry and just trust. 1 John 4:18 says "Perfect love casts out fear".

We need to accept the love that Jesus gives and our biggest fear has no hold over us. We can face the truth about our own mortality without fear. However just as someone walking in the dark will eventually stumble and fall, those who reject Jesus will ultimately face judgment. The only way to avoid stumbling is to walk in the light of Christ.

The last thought I want to reflect on from this very rich story is about, waking up. We reading back through the scriptures know what lies ahead for the disciples and indeed for Jesus. We as onlookers might want to shout at the disciples, "wake up, listen to what he is really saying!" They have journeyed with Jesus, witnessed his miracles, heard his teachings and possibly even saw first hand Mary anointing his feet and heard his response to her. Surely this makes us want to say, "Wake up, by now you know that what Jesus says is not just a simple statement but has depth and meaning that leads to kingdom vision". Somehow their eyes have glazed over and their ears have tuned out. I guess it must be exhausting constantly considering everything that Jesus said and to keep on trying to discern the deeper meanings. They needed a 'wake up call'. How many times have we said that of others who seem to be going the wrong way in life? Or indeed of ourselves, "I just needed that wake up call!" and we don't mean an alarm bell ringing, rather something that makes us stop and realise what we are doing and evaluate our actions. Lazarus is asleep, Jesus says. Following a sickness and He is going to wake him up. In this long passage we might find it difficult to be fully awake and to understand all the nuances but just two words are indeed 'a wake up call,' **Jesus wept**. It's hard to encapsulate those words, Jesus wept. We struggle perhaps with this story and what it means but we know it is so deeply wrapped up in Jesus' sacrifice for a world that is walking in darkness, choosing that dark pathway and stumbling and Jesus weeps. The world has fallen asleep to the message of God's grace and mercy and it needs a 'wake up call'. Those who witnessed Lazarus' resurrection came to faith and many others will and have come to faith who walk through lent to the relive the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let's not make mistakes and misinterpret the wonderful message that we are traveling toward in our Lenten journey. Don't let the marvellous view of Chocolate eggs, Easter bunnies and family feasting stop you from standing up and being counted as one fully awake to the glory that is to come in Christ Jesus.

### **STF 346**

Christ is the world's light,  
Christ and none other;  
born in our darkness,  
he became our brother.  
If we have seen him,  
we have seen the Father:  
glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Peace,  
Christ and none other;  
no one can serve him  
and despise another;  
who else unites us,  
one in God the Father?  
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Life,  
Christ and none other;  
sold once for silver,  
murdered here, our brother -  
he, who redeems us,  
reigns with God the Father:  
glory to God on high.

Give God the glory,  
God and none other;  
give God the glory,  
Spirit, Son, and Father;  
give God the glory,  
God with us, my brother:  
glory to God on high.

## Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we come before you with our prayers for others,

*(I invite you to offer prayers for those who have been brought to your attention in each of the following prayer headings)...*

Put on our hearts the names of people, places and situations that are in need of change, so we can pray with hope.

Lord we pray for those for whom even the smallest change is difficult and upsetting...

We pray for those whose lives have been changed because of illness...

We pray for those whose who want to change but find taking those first few steps difficult...

We pray for those who make changes to policies and laws...

We pray for ourselves that we will be embrace the change you bring in our lives...

God of hope, we offer up our prayers in the name of Jesus as we pray together the  
.....**the Lord's Prayer.**

## STF 345

And can it be that I should gain  
an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
to sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above -  
so free, so infinite his grace -  
emptied himself of all but love,

and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
for, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray -  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
my chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness divine,  
bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

## The Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us; the Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever.

**Amen.**

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