



Sunday, 29 March, 2020

Fifth Sunday of Lent

The Coronavirus Emergency has escalated, with all but essential movement banned and services other than funerals ended. Even funerals now have to be conducted at the crematorium only with attendance limited to ten. This will obviously add greatly to the distress of the bereaved who will be in greater need than ever of our prayerful love and support.

Church buildings must remain closed so there will be no opportunity for people to go there for private prayer and neither clergy nor ALMs will be able to continue last week's pattern. All of this makes it more important than ever that we stay in contact with the congregation during this time and to provide whatever connection we can with Church. Therefore we will continue to produce this pew sheet each week and will send it electronically to as many of the regular congregations' members as we can. It will also be posted online on the websites and Facebook pages. Meanwhile, please do tell us if you know of anyone else who would value receiving this sheet, with if possible, their email address. Much better that we're asked to send it to somebody we have included than overlook somebody who would appreciate it.

Please continue to hold each other in prayer and keep in touch with one another and with Phil and myself.

Finally, remember: God's peace is not the calm after the storm. It's the steadfastness during it. (*Deanna Eslick*).

Sarah

Collect and Readings for Fifth Sunday of Lent

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. Amen.

Old Testament Reading (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 around 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.”

New Testament Reading (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 Reading (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.

Reflection for Fifth Sunday of Lent

Sarah Cottrill

Each of our three readings today resonates, in very different ways, with the situation we are currently facing.

Ezekiel is re-visiting a valley he's been to before. When he returned home after his previous visit, he found himself unable to speak or to leave his home for nearly five years – which puts our isolation period into a little more perspective! More seriously, Ezekiel and his people are facing a difficult and challenging situation into which God speaks words of encouragement and hope – He will bring them through their troubles. They will see restoration and new life. Such hope is also ours; no matter how grim and unending our situation may seem, God is with us in it all and will help us through.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul is stressing the importance of having our minds set on the “things of the Spirit.” In the present crisis, we are seeing and hearing a great deal about people whose minds are set very much on things of the body – and only their own bodies! Panic buying is creating shortages for everybody and the irresponsible behaviour of a few ignoring guidelines has led to enforcements on all of us. But it is not all doom and gloom. In our own communities, we have seen the exact opposite of these attitudes. People – both individuals and businesses - have come together to help others in whatever ways they can, giving freely and generously of

themselves, their time and resources. These people, whether they recognise it in themselves or not, are “ setting their minds on the things of the spirit” in a very practical way. They are demonstrating the love of God and living out the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31 -46) as they serve Christ through their service to each other.

Our Gospel passage tells us the well-known story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. From this story and the way in which Jesus responds to a seemingly hopeless situation, I want us to take three things from which to draw hope and encouragement:

Firstly, Jesus wept with those he loved. He entered fully into the grief of Mary and Martha and he enters into our grief, our fears and anxieties. When people are feeling lonely, worried about loved ones or their own health and future, Jesus is there, sharing all the emotions and waiting for us to turn to him and share our burdens with him. (Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest).

Secondly, Jesus raised people up. He physically raised the dead Lazarus back to life but he also emotionally and spiritually raised Mary and Martha. When something bad happens, there are always people who will question why God allowed it to happen. We see that in today’s story where people questioned why Jesus allowed his friend to die. Mary and Martha, though,

remained faithful to Jesus. Yes, they said that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would have lived, but their's was an expression of faith, not criticism. As a result, Jesus performed the miracle and many more people came to faith in him. The question for us, then, is this: how will the way in which we respond to a given situation affect the faith of others? Will we cause them to doubt God, to remain indifferent to him, or to have faith in him?

Thirdly, Jesus included others in the healing process. We have just seen that it was largely through the faith of Mary and Martha that Jesus came to perform this miracle. They were a vital part of the process. Today, many people are experiencing grief, anxiety and loneliness as a result of the Coronavirus. Jesus wants to involve us all in the process of bringing healing and comfort to them. I have already applauded the actions of many who are doing so much to bring this healing and comfort to those in our local community. As the situation worsens and the limitations on movement become more stringent, this may become more difficult but we must all continue to do all that we can. At the very least (and don't underestimate how important that "least" may be) we can maintain human contact through the internet and, even better, the phone. Above all, of course, we can pray; for our community, our country and for the world as we face the challenges that lie ahead.

My prayer for you all is that you may know the peace, love and comfort of God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Notices

Prayer

Although any form of prayer in our churches is no longer possible, we can of course continue our personal prayers at home. For those with internet access, there are many prayer resources on the Church of England website. The clergy and ALMs would also be very pleased to pray with people by phone or online means such as SKYPE; please refer to the contact details on the back page. Meanwhile, for those of you unable to access the internet, here are a few of the prayers on the church of England website:

Lord Jesus Christ,
you taught us to love our neighbour
and to care for those in need as if we were caring for you.
In this time of anxiety, give us strength to comfort the fearful,
to tend the sick, and to assure the isolated of our love and
your love,
for your name's sake. Amen.

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross;
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gracious God,

give skill, sympathy and resilience to all who are caring for the sick, and your wisdom to those searching for a cure.

Strengthen them with your spirit,
that through their work many may be restored to health;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Weddings and Funerals

No weddings are permitted at this time. Funerals may only take place at the crematorium or the graveside. The Crematorium is limiting attendance to a maximum of ten people and this may be restricted further. We recognise that this is very difficult; while weddings can be postponed, funerals cannot. We will do our best to deal pastorally with each situation within the limitations of the new guidelines. As funerals have to have small numbers, memorial services can be arranged for after the lifting of the restrictions which would allow everyone to honour the person's life.

Coronavirus (Covid-19)

Remember to keep up to date with latest government advice, especially on self-isolating and social distancing. The advice is given for a reason. It is not only for your own protection, but for the protection of the most vulnerable groups in society. Please stay at home as much as possible. If this causes problems, such as with obtaining food, we are available to help; please refer to the contacts list on the back page.

Shopping and Local Food Deliveries

Recent days have been very difficult in the supermarkets. We have a team of volunteers who are willing to help with

shopping should that prove necessary, and supermarkets are prioritising home delivery for the most vulnerable groups.

The two butchers in St Johns are also offering help. Dayus (01905 422459) are taking orders by phone and are doing free home delivery. Payment can also be over the phone. Narraway (01905 424488) have also indicated that they will do their best to help people who are in self-isolation or struggling to get to the shops at this time.