

Parish of St. Thomas, Apostle & Martyr, Ipswich

Sunday, 29th March 2020 5th Sunday of Lent – Passion Sunday

Today marks the beginning of Passiontide, a deeper time of Lent as we meditate the passion of Jesus Christ

(St Thomas Online worship will be on our Facebook page in the morning)



The Raising of Lazarus (Icon)

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, 'Prophesy 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, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, 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 prophesy, 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.'

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

Today is the 5th Sunday of Lent, which is also called Passion Sunday, as we are entering a deeper time of Lent, moving towards Holy Week which starts next Sunday.

Our readings this week are very rich (and rather long), but I hope you can spend time reading and meditating on them. They are powerful as they invite us to consider what it means to have 'life'. This is especially poignant given all that is happening in our world, where the coronavirus has forced us to stop so much of 'normal life'; so many things we are used to doing and take for granted; so many plans are on hold. We are having to take each day at a time. Those of us who are religious are acutely aware that this is a time for prayer – to hold all who are affected by the Virus in our prayers: those who have died, the severely ill, medical staff, care workers and other frontline services and so on – the impact on everyone's life is huge and costly for many – we need God's loving and life-giving spirit to be at work among us.

The readings, both from the prophet Ezekiel and from John's gospel, confront us with death – dead bones with no breath in them; Lazarus, the beloved brother of Jesus' friends Mary and Martha, has died of illness and had his funeral. But in both readings we are shown that this is not the end. God, who creates life, who is the source of all life, of all that moves and has being, wants us to have life – not a life where we rush around always chasing our own goals; fending for ourselves; pursuing what we think is best for ourselves. God has intended us for a life where we know our dependence on God, on each other and our created world; where we know ourselves loved and connected with other beings.

'You are not alive, because you have life in you, but because you have the spirit of God in you. A life that is directed away from God is, whether it knows it or not, no life at all. ... The whole purpose of creation is to mirror God's creativity and love. So to try to live as though there is no God is to destroy the very thing for which we exist, and to drive ourselves further and further away from the source of our life which is God.' (*Jane Williams, Lectionary reflections Year A, SPCK 2004, page 52*)

These are strong, challenging words, but I think they are very true. It is not surprising that many people are turning to practices such as mindfulness and meditation to cope with the strain of this time, with anxiety and fear. Mindfulness practice, meditation, prayer all require us to connect with the moment and with our heart, to be in the here and now. Often this starts with an awareness of our breath, as we notice our breathing in and out. This helps us to be in the here and now. In Hebrew (the language in which the Old Testament is originally written) the word for 'breath' and 'spirit' is the same word, *ruah*. As we need 'breath' to be alive, we need God's life-giving spirit, every moment.

The purpose of Jesus' life was to show us that deep connection between God and each human being, which is founded on compassionate (*latin word: com=with, passion=suffering*) love, a love that is willing to suffer and die for the world, a love that connects all, shows us how to live with God and sets us free.

This year, our experience of Passiontide, Holy Week and Easter will be very different from what we are used to. It feels like a real gift as it provides us with a framework in which to think about and pray for and with the world as we are living through this pandemic. God is with us. – *Rev Jutta*

Collect for the 5th 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 forever.

Please pray for: Eric Dickerson, Rosemary, Adam, Andrew Barfield, Alan Seeley, Kathy Steele, Frank Peggy, Pat, Natacha, Clare Baxter, Andrew Derrett, Christine, Stephen, Julie, Samantha, Jill, Rex, Molly Johansen, Mike Harding, Emily, Brian Sears, Tilly, Gloria Elmer Juliet Adams, Mark Eley, Matthew Hare, Margaret Christian

Births and Birthdays



Naomi Bloomfield's baby 'Dylan James' was born on 22 March. Many congratulations!

Birthdays: Harvey Dunnett (29th)
Pat Wright (30th)
Aaron Brendt (31st); James Pratt (1st)

Pray for all who are affected by the Coronavirus, their families and friends, in the UK and around the world; for health care staff and all who are working long hours in the service of others. For victims of conflict and natural disaster around the world, support agencies and peacemakers; for all who have died.

Pray for members of the St Thomas Congregation (each week we will include a dozen names) Edith, Gareth (wed morning), Eric , June (Baker), Alan Banks, Jenny, Amanda & Luke, Michelle and Stephen, Jenny & Gerry, Pearl, Margaret & Leslie

Appeal from Rev Celia Cook, Chaplain at Ipswich Hospital

A huge thank you to you all for the wonderful boxes of food and drink. They have been much appreciated, particularly as the hospital cafes close and fewer people are allowed to visit. It is a really difficult time here: there is fear in the air, with many staff who are parents, children or partners of vulnerable relatives. The porters and estates staff feel very forgotten too and have been touched by your concern and care for their wellbeing.

We would greatly appreciate further donations which can be left in the chapel 24/7. Please continue to buy the following:

Cans of drink
Cartons of juice
Small packets of biscuits
Crisps
Sweets (special request from Somersham Ward for Freddos, fingers of fudge, Maoams and Haribos!
Chocolate
Kit kats etc
Fruit

Church website:

<http://stthomasipswich.org.uk/>

Church Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/stthomasipswich/>

Please, look out for a worship video on our facebook page on Sunday morning.

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