

Worship@Home 26th March 2023

with Linda Leathersich

Eternal God, thank you that you are always with us, close by our side; that we can face the darkest moments of life, and even the shadow of death itself, with quiet confidence knowing that you have been there before us and will see us safely through. Amen.

HYMN: STF 660

Called by Christ to be disciples every day in every place, we are not to hide as hermits but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom, though this world is where we live, as we serve a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.

Richly varied are our pathways, many callings we pursue: may we use our gifts and talents always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce, college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning, may we see your kingdom come.

Hard decisions may confront us, urging us to compromise; still obedience is our watchword
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred, made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned in submission to our King.

PRAYER

We give thanks and praise to God who leads us on our journey.

Lord you accompany us to the cross and steady us when we stumble,
strengthen us when we wish to hide.

You call us to follow you while you shoulder our burdens. We know that there are many things in our lives for which we need to say sorry, nothing can be hidden from you, forgive us Lord. We thank you for your love and mercy as we accept your forgiveness.

In the 40 days of Lent, we remember the love you showed in the birth, life and death of Jesus; in Christ's healing acts and radical teaching as he walked towards his own death, we recall the words that he spoke to call forth love, care and respect for one another.

We thank you for the assurance of love amidst human betrayal, your care amidst hatred and respect amidst oppression.

Help us always to hear your voice and to obey your will that your kingdom may come. We ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

READINGS:

Ezekiel 37 v 1-14 John 11 v 1-45

MESSAGE:

Today is the 5th Sunday in Lent, Passion Sunday when events took a turn and the coming sufferings of Christ were closer and clearer to everyone. The O.T. lesson is the well-known story of Ezekiel in the Valley of dry bones – a story that reminds us that God will help us in difficult tasks, but, he is still in charge, and, he alone can give life. Ezekiel brought the bones together but God breathed life into them.

In the dramatic gospel reading we have the raising of Lazarus (an account only found in John's gospel, not the other 3 gospels).

All of us need a special somewhere that we can feel totally relaxed, where we can sit and chat or just sit with no pressure. For Jesus, who had no home of his own, that place was the home of his good friends – Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Jesus knew that he was always welcome there, he would receive love, peace and understanding. How Jesus must have treasured his friends and their hospitality.

That is why when Lazarus became ill, the sisters sent to tell Jesus; they had faith in him, they didn't need to ask him to come and heal their brother – maybe they hoped/imagined that he would drop everything and come straight back to heal his friend. As the time ticked past, I imagine that his sisters went through a range of emotions – sadness, anger and disappointment – they felt Jesus had let them down and allowed their brother to die.

Jesus bided his time, he knew that whatever he found in Bethany, he could handle it, it was about more than just healing his friend, it was an act that would glorify God and make others realise who he was, he knew that it meant taking another step towards the cross.

It is often easier to ignore things that will cause us difficulty – Jesus never did, he accepted whatever would follow his actions because he was carrying out his Father's will.

Jesus made his own decision in his own time. The disciples didn't want him to go back to Bethany, they knew it was dangerous, they were afraid – Thomas tried to be brave, but they would all rather have stayed away. Jesus was making the disciples feel uneasy as he was talking more about his death and the suffering that was coming, they could sense danger and they feared being left without him. Sometimes it is hard to keep trusting. But Jesus, knew it was his Father's will and it was right for him to go to Bethany.

When they reached Bethany, they found a house in mourning. Lazarus had been placed in a tomb and there were many people at his home comforting his sisters. At different times Mary and Martha greeted Jesus and they both said the same “If only you had come sooner.” Jesus saw their sorrow, he felt it as well and then we read those lovely words “JESUS WEPT”, Jesus understood their sorrow and shared it even though he knew that he could bring Lazarus back. Jesus always shares our sorrows and offers us comfort.

Jesus went to the tomb and asked for the stone to be rolled away, then he prayed to his Father before commanding Lazarus to come out – Lazarus did and was released from his cloth wrappings. It was a miracle and the authorities couldn't ignore what Jesus had done.

In the OT story, God breathed life into the dry bones, in the gospel story God gave life to Lazarus – only God can give life.

As we journey through Lent we need to see clearly what we need to spring-clean out of our own lives, it isn't just the time to spring-clean our homes – are our lives ready for God to live in us? There are signs of new growth all around us, new life being given by God after the dark days of winter just as he promised.

Jesus commanded us to spread his love and his word to everyone, if we sow seeds of that love and word liberally, then God will give life to those seeds – in his time.

We journey onwards to Good Friday remembering that Jesus knows all about suffering and death but we have the promise of Easter to follow the darkness. God loves us and will never leave us alone, he shares all our pains and sorrows.

Prayers of Intercession and Lord's Prayer

Almighty Father, we pray for our troubled world. We see war and conflict, hatred between groups, racial discrimination and we are tempted to lose heart.

But you never despair of your people.

Lord we pray that you will give peace to the world.

We see sickness and suffering, anxiety & loneliness, fear and mourning and pain overwhelms us. But you share our pain and never leave us.

Lord, give comfort to the world.

We see empty churches, people without a purpose, new gods taking your place and our courage fails us. But, your love is never deterred. Lord give hope to the world and increase our faith.

Give us eyes to see your work around us and help us never to give up but to confidently come to you in prayer and trust in you always. We ask all our prayers in the name of Jesus and join them in the words of the **LORD'S PRAYER**

HYMN – STF 662

Have you heard God's voice: has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made your choice to remain and serve, though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?*

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make your choice to stand your ground when the crowds are turning violent?

Refrain

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start, will you share your faith with the faithless?

Refrain

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace? Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

We will walk the path that will cost us much and embrace the pain and sorrow.

We will trust in One who entrusts to us the disciples of tomorrow.

BLESSING:

Loving God, breathe life into our tired minds, strength to weakened limbs, sight to clouded eyes; warmth into hearts that are cold and loveless.

Come Lord, bring power into ineffective lives. Renew and refresh our souls and send us out to glorify your name. Amen.