

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

29th March 2020

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. (Philippians 3:10)

COLLECT

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.

THE EPISTLE

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.

THE GOSPEL

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.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,
and gave up your life and died for us,
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

We pray for our church leaders as they find solutions to the current restrictionswe thank you for the services now being transmitted by electronic media.... we pray for all those who have found solace through these acts of worship

LORD IN YOUR MERCY - HEAR OUR PRAYER

We pray for our governmentwe acknowledge that there are no easy answers to our current predicament ... give them the wisdom and energy to continue with their work.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY - HEAR OUR PRAYER

We thank you for the dedication of our health care workers, who work long gruelling shifts and risk their own lives to save the lives of others ...

We thank you for all the former medics, and final year doctors and nurses who have volunteered their skills to the NHS, and for the overwhelming response to the call for volunteers to help with non-medical tasks

LORD IN YOUR MERCY - HEAR OUR PRAYER

We also remember those whose jobs and livelihoods are under threat..... please be with them at this anxious time

LORD IN YOUR MERCY - HEAR OUR PRAYER

We pray for the sick, the poor and the elderly.....we thank you that people are coming together in a wonderful way to support each other ... we pray for the many support groups that have sprung up in our own community ...and across the country...

LORD IN YOUR MERCY - HEAR OUR PRAYER

Many now find themselves in static isolation....deprived of their usual activities ...may they use this time as an opportunity to turn towards You and re-evaluate how they spend their time....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY - HEAR OUR PRAYER

We pray for all those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit we particularly remember those suffering from the coronavirus and those in our own community ...

LORD IN YOUR MERCY - HEAR OUR PRAYER

We pray for the bereaved.... and those who comfort them

We remember those in our own faith community who have died and others whom we have loved and lost.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord. **AMEN.**

(Thanks to Liz Hunter for writing these prayers)

GAVIN'S COMMENTARY

John 11: 1-45

At first glance at the reading sheet you will notice that the Gospel is long! We have been given a full account of a family's plight. This is no ordinary family, this is the most intimate grouping around Jesus that we know other than his biological family and his immediate disciples. The personalities within this Bethany group give us clues not only to Jesus' friendships but also to the life of faith that Jesus desires us to live today. This passage shows us what it is to love Jesus and be loved by him.

In a way, this is a very special text for this time of crisis that we are all experiencing. It demonstrates faith being lived out in the ordinary, the mundane, as well as the power of God to save. It describes loss, sorrow, pain, hope, and – incredibly - resurrection. We begin to understand that this is our life pattern too!

The chaos which grief brings is present in the scene at Bethany where many, we are told, came to console Martha and Mary, hearing of their brother's death. Jesus was not to be seen. Was he late? Was he unprepared for this event? When he does arrive, Jesus does not attempt to justify himself or explain the presence of suffering (Jesus never does that). But the narrative leads to the most explosive and comforting "I am" saying to come from the lips of Jesus. "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."

If we are to study the language from this piece of text, we discover that the Greek word *asthenés* in verse 3 is used to describe Lazarus. This word means "without strength," "weak," or "feeble." I wonder what Lazarus' condition was? We know that his sisters loved him. We know that Jesus loved him (verse 36). In Luke's Gospel, Lazarus is not named. Instead, Luke has it that Jesus visits "the house of Martha." Lazarus is unnamed; forgotten to the world, perhaps? It is Jean Vanier's suggestion that Lazarus has a disability and probably a serious one. He asks, "Were the two sisters unmarried in order to look after him?" (Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John, DLT, 2004, p.196).

Whatever the personal circumstances were which led to Lazarus' death, the scene leads to the shortest, pithiest and most dramatic verse in the whole of the New Testament! "Jesus wept." Again, there is no explanation of Jesus' grief or the suffering that the family at Bethany were enduring. Jesus simply comes alongside and shares the suffering. That is what Jesus does – then, now and forever. At a time when we are looking for answers, when we question the motives of God's plan for his people and his creation, we should remember that Jesus shares our pain, our groaning, our anguish.

We can learn much from the family of Bethany. As we begin the Passion of Christ this week, as we travel to Jerusalem next Sunday, to the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday, to the hill of Calvary on Good Friday, into the depths of the earth on Saturday and finally arriving at the Easter Garden on Sunday, pray that Jesus will accompany us, and that we will grow in faith and hope and love. Pray that we may also accompany Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and all the saints. And with them become a parable of hope for our Church and for God's world.