

The Five Alive Praying Together on a Sunday



Sunday 29th March 2020 – Lent 5 – Passion Sunday

You may like to light a candle while you pray as a visible symbol of Jesus being present with you.

The Lord is with us.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Keep a moment of quiet

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise now and for ever. Amen.

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

This story raises so many questions I am unable to answer; perhaps the most fundamental one of them all, is why Jesus stayed two days longer in the place where he was? How can the one who says if you ask in prayer it will be given to you, ignore the sisters' cry? He didn't even say "I'm on my way". He stayed there. Mary and Martha watched their beloved brother die.

Whatever words we try to use to express the truths of this story, they seem woefully inadequate, except to point to what we see in the events as they unfold and in the greater narrative of John's Gospel. It is no coincidence that this story comes at the start of Passiontide – as Christians journey with Christ on the road to the cross and beyond to Easter Day.

We see Jesus stay where we was to pray; undoubtedly to pray for Lazarus and his sisters whom Jesus loved, but also for himself as he makes his way to Judea, where he knows that people are waiting to stone him. He prays that he should know the mind of his Father to change things, which we know came through the cross and resurrection.

We see Martha's belief unchanged, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" and we see her trust "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day".

We see Jesus ask Mary to take him to the place of her deepest sorrow and grief, the tomb. "Show me" he says, wanting her to go to that place, and to take him with her so they go together.

We see the compassion of God who weeps with Mary and all who wept. This is the meaning of God, the Word who became flesh. Not only a human being who is also divine; but God the Creator, the Almighty weeping with and for all in pain and anguish.

We see the power of God's work when they said, "come and see". When they took him to the tomb, and the stone which sealed the grief and pain is rolled back, God showed them what life his love for them brings.

We see the belief in others grow as they watch and see the sister's belief and as they act in trust, and as we see the work of God unfold in ways that few ever since have found the words to explain.

When a loved one is ill, when God doesn't seem to answer the prayer we pray over and over, when life doesn't seem fair,how often questions of faith arise, which we who believe find difficult or impossible to answer. Yet we pray.

We pray for those we love. We pray for ourselves that we might come to know the mind of our Father and understand a little more the meaning of the journey to the cross and the first Easter morning.

We pray for the steadfast belief of Martha, and that our faith will deepen whatever the path, and whatever the questions that arise.

We pray we'll recognise Jesus when he says, "show me".

We pray we'll feel the presence of God with us weeping when it's hard, and that we'll let God into the sealed places within ourselves, to let him work miracles.

We pray that we'll accept words won't explain a lot of what we believe about God, but that others shall see through our faith and by our trust, the work of God unfolding.

Keep a moment of quiet to reflect before praying.

Prayers

Prepared by Robin Flack (Crophorne)

Lord Jesus, you loved the home and family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany. It was perhaps the closest you came to a home of your own, where you could rest and relax for a while, and gain strength for the work ahead. In these strange and challenging times when we are confined to our homes, help us to appreciate and value them more, as places not of confinement but of security and peace.

Thank you, Lord, that rising above all the instances of selfishness we have seen in stockpiling supplies, there have emerged wonderful initiatives in community help, and inventive ways of using the internet and social media to hold together the fabric of society, in commerce, and in promoting health, recreation, education, and general morale.

In the coming week, as this virus appears to gather momentum, be with all those in the front line of the battle against it, whether in government, NHS procurement, or food distribution, and all medical staff working under huge pressure and at great personal risk. Support and strengthen them, and all families directly affected by infection, particularly those suffering the death of a loved one.

In everything that may befall them and us, in the days ahead, may we, O Lord, hold fast to the truth that you are and bring in the resurrection, and that you showed us in your response to the death of your friend Lazarus; that you are a God whose heart is wrung with anguish for the anguish of your people; that the greatest thing you did was to bring us news of a God who cares so deeply that he enters fully into our human condition, its joys and its suffering. Amen.

Collect for Lent 5 – Passion Sunday

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.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory
are yours now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn: The Lord's my Shepherd

Ctrl + click link to play hymn provided free by RSCM

<https://youtu.be/8c8E11dA8Ng>.

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
and He anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
for You are with me, and Your rod and staff
are the comfort, I need to know.

Words: Psalm 23
adapted Stuart Townend
Music: Stuart Townend

The Lord bless us and watch over us;
the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us;
the Lord look kindly in us and give us peace.
Amen.