



Welcome to the second bulletin of the

Bredon Hill Group of Parishes.

Please share it with anyone who you feel will be interested.

29th March 2020 – Fifth Sunday of Lent



View from the Vicarage

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When I first arrived in Eckington last summer, I did not expect within a year to be writing to people locally in a time of national emergency, but here we are! As they keep saying in the media, we are indeed living in unprecedented times!

The shocking news this week of a national lockdown because of a Virus which threatens illness and loss of life to people around us, is a time of great fear and challenge, but also a time which brings out the very best of our humanity. Like most of you, I have had to face and make difficult decisions about how to care for relatives who may get sick, face the prospect of not being able to enjoy social times and activities with friends; and of course, most difficult for many, face the fact that our source of comfort and strength in times of adversity, our churches, have also had to be closed to public worship, weddings and baptisms.

These are not easy times, and we will all be faced with many and varied challenges in the weeks ahead.

However, it is my hope and intention, to produce a weekly Bulletin, which will include some Bible readings for the week, a reflection and some prayers for people to use. Through this, and by reaching out to as many people as we can, I feel that we can all still feel connected into the Church, even though we cannot physically be present together.

I have been reminded this week that St. Paul spent many hours incarcerated in a prison cell, because of his desire to share the Good News of Christ with others. Out of his witness, and in spite of all the trials he went through, his letters now form a large part of the New Testament of the Bible, and which through the ages, continue to offer much comfort and consolation to many people.

This time we spend in isolation, may actually be such an opportunity to connect with friends and family in new and different ways; we may find that through them we deepen our sense of community and compassion as we seek to support others who get sick, experience bereavement and who find the isolation difficult to bear; And we may now find, that we can actually make and take the time to read the Bible and pray in a way that has never been needed as much as it is now.

For those of you who have not yet looked, there is an increasing amount of prayer and liturgy resources for people to view and access on the Church of England and the Worcester Diocesan websites. Details of these are www.churchofengland.org and www.cofe-worcester.org.uk

I will be happy to receive any emails or experiences of how you are coping in these extraordinary times, and to pray with you, either through email or on the telephone. In this way we can connect with each other and help share these times of isolation. My details are eckingtonvicarage@hotmail.com or 01386 750203. Sometimes a quick chat may be all that is needed to support each other.

Please therefore be assured of my prayers for everyone around the Hill and beyond, during these uncertain times. We need to stay strong and hold onto the fact that Christ is our source of hope and peace and when we turn to Him, He will be there to support and comfort us.

May God bless you and all whom you love and pray for.

Allison

Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group

Sunday 29th March – Fifth Sunday of Lent

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.

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."

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.

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 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 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 upward 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 on The Raising of Lazarus

Like many of you this week I have been spending a large proportion of my time at home, gradually getting used to the what is going to be our probable way of living for the next few months, that of isolation. And as we watch the news or listen to the radio, stories of the growing number of cases arising from the Corona virus are becoming more and more frightening, particularly as the numbers of people dying make increasingly concerning statistics.

Facing illness and death is of course something that we all have to do at some point in our lives, perhaps more so as we get older; And there is a natural order to things, where we expect older people to die before children. However, this current virus, is challenging our thoughts and thinking that hopefully we will not die until we reach some grand ripe age.

Mary and Martha, two very close friends of Jesus are left understandably bereft when their brother Lazarus dies. In their grief they berate Jesus, whom they love and believe to be the Messiah, (as the name implies, the One who Saves) for allowing this situation to happen; "*If only you had been here, my brother would not have died*" they cry, literally!

Jesus, when hearing their cries, visits Lazarus' tomb; And He too is moved to tears. For Jesus understands grief; He is moved by the tears of the people He loves; and He Himself understands all that people across the world are currently going through, as they mourn the sickness and loss of loved

ones; There can be no doubt that Christ is sharing the grief, anger and frustration of all who are suffering in these difficult times.

The wonderful thing about this story is that Mary and Martha completely and unreservedly loved and trusted Jesus; And they believed, that whatever happened after Lazarus had died, he would rise again to a new life with Christ. Their faith in Jesus to do the right thing, was second to none. Jesus did, in fact, bring Lazarus back from the dead; And as a result, many people put their faith in Him.

Sadly, our current situation forces us to confront the fact that people we know, and love, may get sick, and some may even die. Physically, they are unlikely to be raised from the dead, although Jesus is a God of the miraculous! However, in these times our faith needs to be as strong as that of Marth and Mary, believing that Jesus holds us, and will bring all who die into a new life with Him.

Lent, reminds us that Jesus Himself, had to come to terms with the coming of His own death. Was he frightened? Probably! Did he wish that there was another way of accomplishing what He needed to do? Most definitely! Did He shy away from trusting in God for all that was to happen as he made His final journey towards Jerusalem and the Cross? Absolutely not!

Instead Jesus, prayed to God for strength, and trusted that for all who believe, "*they will see the glory of God*".

This needs to be our comfort as we journey through unprecedented times; When faced with adversity, we need to remember that Christ's Spirit living within us will strengthen our mortal bodies to cope with all that life may throw at us. As the psalmist in Psalm 77 reminds us, that after "*I cried out to the God for help; I cried out to God to hear me*", then he remembered, "*Your ways are holy, What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles*".

This week let us hold one another in prayer as we pray for miracles! Miracles of healing for those who are sick, miracles of comfort for those who grieve; miracles of protection for people who are putting their lives at risk as they care for others, and the miracle of love and compassion as we seek to support communities around us.

May God grant us all, faith that the Holy Spirit living in us, will bring comfort and strength in the days ahead and a hope of eternal life of light and love. Amen.

Prayers

Please pray for the ill and isolated, hospital and medical research staff, all those working on the frontline and those who have died. We pray for all whose anniversary of death falls at this time and for all who have been bereaved.

If you would like a prayer for someone particularly on the next bulletin, please email us on the address below.

Prayers about the outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen**

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,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

For those who are ill

Merciful God,
we entrust to your tender care
those who are ill or in pain,
knowing that whenever danger threatens
your everlasting arms are there to hold them safe.
Comfort and heal them,
and restore them to health and strength;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

For hospital staff and medical researchers

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 will be restored to health;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

For one who is ill or isolated

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing can separate me
from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

For the Christian community

We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.
We are your people God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs
For as long as it takes
wherever you call us. **Amen**

Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference

Daily Bible Readings for Monday 30th March – Saturday 4th April

Monday 30 th March	Joshua 2: 1-14 John 8: 1-11
Tuesday 31 st March	Numbers 21: 4-9 John 8: 21-30
Wednesday 1 st April	Daniel 3: 14-20, 24-25, 28 John 8: 31-42
Thursday 2 nd April	Genesis 17: 3-9 John 8: 51-end
Friday 3 rd April	Jeremiah 20: 10-13 John 10: 31-end
Saturday 4 th April	Ezekiel 37: 21-end John 11: 45-end

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