



# Fifth Sunday of Lent

## A Short Service of Prayer for those at home

Words from Psalm 25 & 107

Show me your ways, O Lord,  
teach me your path and guide me in truth,  
for you are God, my Saviour.  
Let me give thanks to the Lord  
for his unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.

### A Reading from the Bible

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, only 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.'

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.'

*Ezekiel, Chapter 37*

## **A Reading from the Gospel of St John**

Chapter 12

Jesus told his listeners, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.' shortly after he continued, 'Now my heart is troubled, what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this I came.'

When he finished speaking he went and hid himself from them. Despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

Light a candle

(please ensure this is done safely)

*Pause for a moment of quiet*

## **Thought for the Day**

As we edge towards Easter, the mood of Jesus changes quite dramatically in our reading, today we see Jesus as we have never seen him before, sombre and displaying a sense of defeat! Jesus tells his listeners, '*The hour has come,*' his story is about to change irrevocably for soon he will be betrayed by Judas and led to his death on the cross.

This passage is like an open door into his heart, Jesus says, '*My heart is troubled, shall I say Father, save me from this hour?*' Candidly Jesus believes he can do no more for his countrymen, despite all the miraculous signs he has done in the presence of the people, still they do not believe he is the Messiah, the one promised and sent by God. Just for a moment, we see the humanity of Jesus painfully exposed as he contemplates his own death and destiny.

Over the past weeks of Lent we have reflected upon Christian character and our need to become more Christ-like, to do this of course requires one ingredient, faith, faith to believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Like a signpost, Jesus' life points us heavenwards towards God. He tells all who will listen '*Trust in God and trust also in me... for I am the way, the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father except through me.*' (John 14 v 1-7)

Faith to believe in a 'God of Miracles,' whose own Son was made man, flesh and blood among us is not just a challenge peculiar to our modern world, it seems Jesus encountered stiff resistance to his message in his own time in a not dissimilar way to that of the prophet Ezekiel hundreds of years before him.

Just under 600 years earlier, Ezekiel has this strange encounter with God in the 'Valley of Dry Bones.' God says to Ezekiel, '*These bones are the whole House of*

*Israel... their hope has gone.* This picture vividly and metaphorically portrays Israel in a time of great need, a nation enslaved, without hope or faith to believe their destiny could be different. God asks Ezekiel, 'Can these dry bones live?'

The question presents unexpected possibilities, perhaps they can, but does Ezekiel have the faith to believe it could be so? Ezekiel answers, *'You alone know, Sovereign Lord.'*

Today, we hear how both Ezekiel and Jesus' faith in God is challenged to believe that the impossible is possible with God. Ezekiel does what the Lord commands him and incredibly the 'dry bones' that are beyond salvation are given a new future.

Our Gospel reading looks into the depths of Jesus' own heart, he knows he is going to die but will his death on the cross be the end, or is there more. Jesus had spoken guardedly about his death, he had hinted at the resurrection, *'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.'* (Mark 8 v 31)

Despite all he had said, Jesus must now face his own fears, is there an antidote to doubt? Yes, faith. Jesus taught that faith, even the size of a mustard seed can move mountains! If Jesus is sombre and having doubts when he rhetorically asks himself 'shall I ask the Father to spare me from this hour,' we can forgive him for being human. But what is important for us as we face the challenges we meet daily in life, in both passages we see faith conquering doubt.

Ezekiel acknowledges the limitations of his understanding but is willing to see what God can do. As Jesus reminds himself that despite what lies ahead, for this he came. He too, despite his fears throws his life and destiny utterly into the hands of God.

FAITH is a form of hope, not in oneself but in the unseen God of miracles. HOPE goes beyond belief, beyond words, for Christian hope is the pathway to sharing the life Jesus offers, finding our way both in life and death and utterly placing our trust in all that Jesus teaches us, that what HE promises us is the truth.

In hindsight, we know how the Easter story ends and thus we gain an insight into our own destiny BUT in the meantime, our faith and hope will be challenged not just by the certain prospect of death but by the daily ordeals our humanity continues to face.

Sometimes it will feel like we are between a rock and a hard place, unsurprisingly when we are at our weakest our need for hope becomes greatest. Like Jesus, it is only at such moments when we have to lay down the trust we place in ourselves, when all seems lost that faith becomes our most precious hope. Hold onto faith and you will hold on to the God of infinite possibilities. Peace be with you. AMEN

### **A Reflective Prayer**

Lord God, our refuge and our redeemer,  
may my words, thoughts and actions be acceptable to you;

seldom can I see my faults or my failings,  
have mercy on me, O God,  
cleans me from my sins and deliver me from evil.  
Let your goodness and love follow me all the days of my life  
and let me live in your presence for ever. AMEN

### **Prayers for the World**

Have mercy on all your people O God  
in this new and challenging world that stands before us.  
Bring healing and wholeness to people and nations,  
and have pity on those suffering in their isolation.

Strengthen all who are fearful of disease and death,  
bring them to a new hope in Christ.  
Hear the cry of those who lament the passing of loved ones,  
grant them your peace and surround them with your presence.

Give rest to the departed  
and bring them, with your saints, to glory everlasting.  
We commend the world to you for which Christ died,  
lead us in the pathways of truth and grant us your wisdom O God,  
now and forever more.

Our Father, who art in heaven  
Hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come; thy will be done;  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
But Deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
The power and the glory,  
For ever and ever. AMEN



### **Closing Prayer**

My heart is steadfast, O God;  
for great is your love, higher than the heavens;  
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.  
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,  
and let your glory be over all the earth. AMEN.