

*into his courts  
with praise...*



A Service of the Word  
for  
Sunday 22 March 2026  
Fifth of Lent.

## A Service of the Word for Sunday morning

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### INTRODUCTION

*“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.”*

*Romans 8:11.*



### THE CONFESSION

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all. Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our sins in penitence and faith.

**Almighty God,  
I confess that I have sinned against you  
in thought, word and deed;  
I have not loved you with all my heart;  
I have not loved my neighbours as myself.  
Have mercy upon me,  
cleanse me from my sins,  
and help me to overcome my faults,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Receive God's forgiveness*

May the Father forgive us  
By the death of His Son  
And strengthen us  
To live in the power of the Spirit  
All our days. **Amen.**

**PRAISE**

O Lord, open my lips...  
**and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.**  
Give me the joy of your saving help...  
**and sustain me with your life-giving Spirit.**

**THE COLLECT**

Gracious Father, you gave up your Son  
out of love for the world: lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,  
that we may know eternal peace through the shedding of our Saviour's  
blood, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

*Suggested hymn to sing or read* **O breath of life come sweeping through us.**

**THE WORD OF GOD.**

**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 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, 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, prophesy, 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 prophesy, 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.'

**Psalm 130.**

Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord;  
Lord, hear my voice; ♦  
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.  
If you, Lord, were to mark what is done amiss, ♦  
O Lord, who could stand?  
But there is forgiveness with you, ♦  
so that you shall be feared.  
I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; ♦  
in his word is my hope.  
My soul waits for the Lord,  
more than the night watch for the morning, ♦  
more than the night watch for the morning.  
O Israel, wait for the Lord, ♦  
for with the Lord there is mercy;  
With him is plenteous redemption ♦  
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

## **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.

*Suggested hymn to sing or read O for a thousand tongues to sing.*

## **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.

### **REFLECTION – Jesus calls the dead to life.**

Today is Passion Sunday when we think of Jesus' suffering through his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. I wondered why we were set the raising of Lazarus as a reading for this week and not a reading from the crucifixion, but I began to see why as I read the commentaries and thought about it.

The first thing that sprang at me as I read the three readings set for this week was that they were all about life and death – well, death and being called to life really. The Ezekiel reading is the famous one about the valley of bones, which God brings back together, then clothes in flesh and skin and breathes the breath of life into them. He prophesies through Ezekiel that even Israel, who have wandered way from God (again) can be brought back to life as God's nation again, just like the dry bones.

The reading from Romans talks about life in the flesh (which leads to death) and life in the Spirit, which is the start of eternal life in Christ. And of course our Gospel reading from John is about calling Lazarus back to life from the dead.

The next thing that struck me, reading the gospel, was how real the situation of the death of Lazarus is. The grief of the sisters is real. Jesus too, is sorrowful and weeps with the sisters, and is deeply moved at the tomb. It feels authentic, with the rawness and bewilderment of bereavement – it brought back my own experiences, and I was able to think myself into Martha and Mary's place to some extent.

This isn't a callous set-up by Jesus. You could get the impression from the reading that Jesus deliberately waited the two extra days so that Lazarus would be dead and buried, past the 3 day point where the Jews believed

that the spirit left the body. But Jesus, as always, is listening to his Father and following his will.

This is the last 'sign' or 'miracle' that Jesus performs in John's gospel before the ultimate and most important sign of his own death and resurrection. It's the last proof of his Messiahship, and like all the 'signs' in John, it has an outward action and an inner meaning.

Jesus has a conversation with Martha when he arrives, She voices her regret that he wasn't there, and the belief that Lazarus wouldn't have died if he had been there. She knows that Lazarus is dead, but she clearly believes and trusts in Jesus whatever happens. Jesus says to her 'Your brother will rise again.'

She thinks he is referring to the belief of some Jews in resurrection of believers when the world comes to an end. And Jesus replies to her 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

She replies 'Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.'

Here we have the first confession of faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the final confirmation. Not Peter, as in the other three gospels, but Martha. Here is the whole turning point of the gospel. From now on we're heading towards the crucifixion.

In the middle of the story giving us the outer sign, the physical raising of Lazarus from death to life, we have the inner meaning. Jesus is the Messiah, he is the resurrection and the life. By believing in him we enter into new life, eternal life in him, a life that will not end, even when our physical bodies die.

Martha goes to find Mary and brings her to Jesus. I notice that Mary also says to Jesus, 'Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

They all go to the tomb, Jesus weeping with them. The Jews notice Jesus weeping and comment on how much Jesus loved Lazarus, although again, some of them are saying that if he could give a blind man sight, couldn't he have saved Lazarus from death? Can you imagine having this rumbling questioning of everything you do - or don't do - following you wherever you go, whatever you do, even in the most private moments of grief?

When they get to the cave where Lazarus has been laid, Jesus commands that the stone at the entrance is taken away. Practical Martha can't help cutting in and reminding Jesus that it's four days since Lazarus was buried, there will be a bad smell, his body will be decomposing. What is Jesus doing? Jesus reassures her, though it must have gone straight over her head at that point! Then he talks out loud to the Father, so that the people around will know that it's God the Father in control, and so that they will believe who Jesus is – the Messiah, God's Son.

And then it happens – can you imagine being at the tomb with the stone rolled away when Jesus calls 'Lazarus, come out!'?

What would you feel, seeing Lazarus with his grave clothes, hands and feet wrapped up and his face covered coming out – amazement, horror, joy, shock, bewilderment? This doesn't happen, shouldn't happen! But how wonderful for Mary and Martha to have their loved brother restored to them.

This sign will also prepare the disciples for Jesus' own death and resurrection. Only the Messiah has the power to raise the dead back to life, he has the authority over life and death. As Jesus' followers this Lent, we have been travelling with Jesus through the journey of his ministry. Now we turn towards Jerusalem and the lead up to the crucifixion.

Whatever has happened or is happening to you now in your journey through life, Jesus is right there with you. He understands your pain, and your reactions. You can tell him all about it. You can even shout at him about it, as I have done sometimes. We might not understand why something has happened to us or those we love, but we can trust our Lord, even if we feel raw with grief and bewilderment.

He came that we might have life, and have it in abundance. We thank him and ask him to help us believe and trust in him, and help us to love him and to use us in his work.

**Sheila Falkner.**

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **Father, I place into your hands.***

### **THE CREED**

**All I believe in God the Father,  
whose loving care is the pattern for family life.**

**I believe in Jesus, the Son of God,  
who lives in my heart through faith,  
and fills me with his love.**

**I believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens me with power from on high.**

**I believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **THE PRAYERS**

*A time of quiet prayer for*

- *The universal Church - Bishops, synods and all leaders church*
- *The leaders of the nations*
- *The natural world and the resources of the earth*

**Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of Peace.**

**Look upon our divided world**

**to be with those who are victims of violence.**

**We pray for the people of Ukraine**

**and all who have been subjected to the cruelty of others.**

**Help us to know the gift of your peace**

**in the power of your Spirit and**

**we ask you to soften the hearts**

**of those who can stop the fighting.**

**Creator God, we ask for your aid as your children of light**

**living in the darkness of our world.**

**Amen.**

*Cumbria Ecumenical Spirituality Group.*

*Finishing with the South Calder Mission Community prayer...*

**Heavenly Father we thank you for the life of your Church  
in this place, and in all the villages of the South Calder  
Mission Community;  
for all who have served and worshipped you in years gone by,  
for all who make up your family in our churches today,  
for the faith we have in common, and for the people and  
traditions which make each church unique.  
By your Spirit, guide and equip us,  
that together we might find new ways  
to reach out to our local community,  
to show your love to our neighbours,  
and to encourage them  
to follow the Lord Jesus in their lives.  
Father, we offer ourselves to your service,  
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
And in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

*and the Lord's prayer...*

**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.**

## THE CONCLUSION

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **The Spirit lives to set us free.***

*The following prayer is said*

**Be with me, Lord, as I finish my prayer today.  
May my lips always speak the truth;  
may my eyes which have read your word  
see only what is good;  
and may my life as well as my worship  
be always pleasing in your sight,  
for the glory of your name. Amen.**

And now may the Lord who brought us to birth by his Spirit,  
strengthen us for the Christian life.

May the Lord who provides for all our needs  
sustain us day by day.

May the Lord whose steadfast love is constant as a mother's care,  
send us out to live and work for others.

And the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be with us and remain with us always.

**Amen.**

So now may I go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

## **Links for the hymns**

O breath of life come sweeping through us.

<https://youtu.be/M3bsgoPjcg4>

O for a thousand tongues to sing.

<https://youtu.be/4O9kw3clLpg>

Father, I place into your hands.

<https://youtu.be/uHGokg-rYOl>

The Spirit lives to set us free.

<https://youtu.be/SDcbYk-9C-Y>