

Lent 5: Passion Sunday

Gospel Reading for 29 March 2020

John 11: 1 - 45

The Raising of Lazarus

This country has entered an unprecedented and unique period in our history. What seemed possible a week ago has now become impossible if we are to grapple with and overcome this new virulent virus. The streets are eerily quiet and only the supermarkets are busy but in a much more controlled way. Countless people have stopped working or been laid off work, some not knowing when they can start again or when the next pay cheque will arrive. They watch their savings drain away. The knock-on effect of the shutdown has not yet been fully realised. The effect on the homeless and those already in poverty has not been fully dealt with. Health professionals are worried for their own safety and yet continue to work with compassion. Some will feel that after this they perhaps do not want to do their particular job ever again. The churches have closed their doors and many are feeling spiritually disconnected from their place of worship and those they used to fellowship with.

And yet---there is a connectedness that binds us together, a kindness and concern from the most unexpected people. We have spoken more to our neighbours this week than we have for a long time and offers of help abound. The appeal by our Prime Ministers for volunteers had a target of 250,000; over 400,000 people have enlisted to the appeal. We have all been humbled by such response. Groups gather around Skype and Zoom technology and virtual meetings take place by telephone. In these people pray together, study together and offer help together.

We are coming to grips with a church without, not within, walls and there is much to access from all denominations for those who have access to

the internet. This church is gathering in spirit through its pastoral visitors and leaders and we hope that no-one feels forgotten. Each and every one of us have a role to play. The wider community is not forgotten either as support continues for all our outreach priorities even if only by money and giving time and goods as we can.

The lectionary for this week demonstrates fully the compassion of Jesus. As Jesus senses the danger to his life as he approaches Jerusalem, he makes up his mind to travel to Bethany to respond to the call for help from his friends Martha and Mary. But he too late, their dear brother has died. The sisters are both grief stricken and angry. They are sure that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had come sooner. Jesus recognised their grief –and wept. Verse 37, the shortest verse in the Bible says it all. Jesus understands and shares the sisters' pain as he does with the world today in all its sorrow and distress. Perhaps it is this that we as church can work towards--- alignment with others and help transform our places of devastation to places of hope. It is our voices, our acts of kindness that can lead from grief to joy, from death to resurrection. The world needs our love and care at this time and as we mourn with those who have lost their dear ones; let us mourn in hope of a better world. The Lord who weeps is the Lord who resurrects-- 'I am the Resurrection and the Life' he says. Words to remember in this and coming weeks and when this is all over may we continue to be more kind, more caring, more loving to each other in the name of Jesus.

Janet Anderson

PRAYER for this Passion Sunday

Jesus wept — for the loss of a beloved friend.

There are many weeping Lord at this time for the loss of a loved one; may we hold them in our prayers.

As the 'clouds' gather may we appreciate and be aware of the gift of time we have been given.

Time to open our eyes and see our neighbours who may need practical help or a word of encouragement.

Time to show love and kindness by reaching out to others through a phone call, the internet, a card.

A time to give and a time to receive the unexpected kindness and help from neighbours.

Lord we have time for prayer and time to acknowledge your loving presence with us —

A time to Be —

In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Christine Pearson

