

## **St Peter's Peebles and St Andrew's Innerleithen**

29th March 2020. Lent 5, Passion Sunday

“The Raising of Lazarus”

Things have moved so fast in a week in our nation and in the world in relation to the effects of Corona virus. Church buildings are locked. Our hearts are open. Most of us are confined to our homes. But our spirits are free. Fear and misinformation abound. And yet God's love enfolds us and we touch base with truth.

Although separated physically from each other, during these weeks God's people are closely joined in a fellowship nothing can break.

The Scottish Episcopal Church is broadcasting Sunday worship again this week at 11am. Some of us found it difficult to join in using link to the Scottish Episcopal Church website at the time, but others had no problem from Facebook, and if you search for the Scottish Episcopal Church on YouTube you will find it there for several days too. So choose your time. (Facebook users: may I also recommend you “like” on the “St Mary's Cathedral Glasgow” page? There's some good worship there too and this week was art historian Deborah Lewer's brilliant 5 minute meditation on a fabulous painting of the annunciation. You'll also find these on their website.)

I will be celebrating Holy Communion, on my own, at home this coming Sunday 29th March at 10.30am, the time we were due to be gathering for our joint service at St Andrew's. If you choose, that might be a good time to read through the words below, so we can know that others are doing the same. And try a “virtual communion” if you'd like. Have a small piece of bread or an oatcake to hand if you are on your own, or to share if you are with others in your home. You'll see where to do this:

### **Opening Prayer**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.

O God of Life, Eternity cannot hold you, nor can our little words catch the magnificence of your kindness, Yet in the space of our homes today, and in our hearts, and in silence, you come close and are with us.

### **Confession**

O loving Christ, hanged on a tree, yet risen in the morning, scatter the sin from our souls as the mist from the hills; begin what we do, inform what we say, and redeem who we are. In you we place our hope, our great hope, our living hope, this day and evermore. Amen.

### **Prayer for the week (the “collect”)**

(This is a prayer used in all Scottish Episcopal services today)

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us with the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### **Hymn**

“Love Divine All Loves Excelling”

This link leads to a beautiful version of Charles Wesley’s famous hymn set for choir by Howard Goodall

[https://youtu.be/Zl10mQgDJ\\_o](https://youtu.be/Zl10mQgDJ_o)

The words of the last verse are ones I treasure:

Finish then, thy new creation,  
Pure and spotless let us be  
Let us see thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in thee;  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in Heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

### **Readings**

(If you have time the Old Testament reading is the brilliant story of the Valley of the Dry Bones, Ezekiel 37.1-14

The Psalm is 130 - a very appropriate short affirmation this week.

The Epistle is Romans 8. 6-11. The last verse is one to note!)

Gospel for today

John 11.1-45. The raising of Lazarus

### **Reflection**

The gospel story today is a rehearsal for Easter Day, in just two week’s time.

It’s about the transforming potential both of the Gospel and also of the Christian community in the world today.

The story is in two parts- what happens before everyone gets to the grave, and then what happens once they arrive.

I’ll pick on a few verses to look at:

Part 1

v. 5. Jesus loves Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus. The greek word used here is “agape” - it’s God’s self giving love, not just friendly affection.

v17. Four days- poor Lazarus is now legally dead.

v21. Mary is hurt and angry, and says so. It’s natural for us to express our feelings and questions to Jesus. What do you need to say to God, to ask God, this week?

v.25 “I am the resurrection and the life”- one of the most famous sayings of Jesus. Ever. The words used is “anastasis” which means “standing up”. Like standing up after being seated, or standing a ladder up. So here we have two meanings at once- He stands, and He raises others. Through Jesus the transforming energy of the Father flows. This is what raises from death.

v 35. Don't hurry the shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus wept. Or groaned. Or to be more true to the greek word he snorted or panted - it's the word used to describe the shuddering of a horse when confronted by something that frightens it. Jesus trembled in spirit as he is confronted by the reality of death.

Part 2

They get to a rock hewn tomb with a stone rolled against the entrance. If this sounds familiar, it is meant to! John puts the story in this place as a rehearsal for the easter drama, and the Church has it today, with two weeks to go.

The stone is removed and we now get to the climax of the story:

v.43 Jesus shouted, literally “yelled”, Lazarus! Hither! Out! (If you know JRR Tolkien's “Fellowship of the Ring” it's in the same frame as Gandalf authoritative, protective shout to the evil Balrog in the Mines of Moria “YOU SHALL NOT PASS!”)

v.44 “loose him and let him go” the word is “aphesis”, “let go”- a Bible word for forgiveness (it's used in relation to the release of prisoners, and slaves from slavery, and it was also shouted to start a horse race!)

So a question dear friends at St Peter's and St Andrew's.... What implication does this story of “anastasis” of the raising of Lazarus, have for the Church at large in the world in our generation, and for our church communities here in Peebles, Innerliethen, in the Tweed Valley today?

What difference could people of faith make during this time of shut down, confinement and its aftermath?

In what ways would our cry “Lazarus, Hither, Out” transform lives today?

Perhaps it could include:

- People of all ages being inspired and equipped to serve
- Lives being transformed
- Injustice confronted
- Addictions broken
- Hope kindled
- Kindness shared
- Forgiveness extended and found
- Death defied

You see, I do really believe that in these and other ways Christians can “raise the dead”. What do you think?

## **Prayers**

(please add your own thoughts and names)

Heavenly Father breathe new life into the Church. Grant us authority and love to proclaim Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life. Bless Bishop John, our Rector designate Andrew, and all Christian leaders with renewed faith.....

Bless the wilderness places of the world, where springs of hope have become dry, ..... Strengthen with your life-giving spirit all medical staff, scientists, emergency services, governments and carers who strive to serve and find solutions....

Lead us, our friends and families in the way of love and of hope.....

Comfort those who are struggling in their homes..... Strengthen those who grieve.... Give the spirit of life to those whose hearts are broken by fear and sorrow....

Reach into this world with your love, Living God, transform the terror of this moment into new hope, relieve the cries of your people with your quiet voice of peace, that here we may know your salvation, your glory, our future in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. Amen.

### **The Peace and the breaking of bread**

We think of all those we normally share the peace with in our churches  
Now in union with Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near.  
For he is our Peace.

In silence you now may wish to take and hold the small piece of bread or oatcake you prepared. Give thanks for the blessing of God's love. Break it, remembering how Jesus shared his life. And eat at least a little of it, remembering Jesus feeds us with heavenly love every day and strengthens us to love and to serve.

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.  
Do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom,  
the power and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

### **Blessing**

Christ crucified draw us to himself, to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sins forgiven; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us today and evermore. Amen.

### **Hymn**

“Lift High the Cross”

This link has the words on the screen and the singing is really uplifting!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbcBXYP4AIE>

Next Week is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week 2020. We cannot join a procession this year, or even have new palm crosses to take home. But remember the palm branches were used as flags, they represented the national tree of the people of Israel, waved defiantly and hopefully. So in preparation for our worship next week, if you are able to go on a walk, find a twig coming into bud or flower and bring it home. Or you may have a small saltire or other national flag at home? Or even a favourite scarf? We will wave them, in our different homes, but as one in spirit. Dear friends, I am thinking of you all each day.

Cedric Blakey

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