**Sunday 2 April 2017**

**LENT 5**

John 11:1-45

Romans 8: 6-11

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Psalm 130

***Prayer before worship:***

*As once in a vision, the valley of dry bones stood up alive, and as once Jesus stood fearless at death's door calling Lazarus to be unbound from death, raise us up Lord God, rattle our dry bones, unbind us and breathe new life into our midst, Amen.*

**Welcome**

**Call to Worship:**

To these old human bones, thus says the Lord God:

I shall cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.

***We wait for the Lord, our souls wait,***

***and in God’s word we place our hope.***

O my people, when I open up your tombs

and raise you from your graves,

you shall know that I am the living Lord.

***Our soul waits for the Lord,***

***more than nightwatchmen for the dawn,***

***more than watchmen for the dawn.***

**Songs of Praise:** I will give thanks to Thee

Above all

**Opening Prayer**

Loving God, you who are above all, ruler of life and death, please look with compassion on this congregation as we come before you. As we worship you in the glory of all your love, please multiply the sources of abundant life within us, that we may choose to live our lives boldly and without regret.

We thank you, loving God, for the vulnerable yet wonderful gift of life.

To be alive and to know it is an unspeakable honour.

We thank you that all life is precious in your sight.

We thank you God of faithfulness, that our movement towards physical death and decay is not the final sentence in our story.

We thank you that by faith we are born to a new and living hope in a future where love  never ends.

We thank you, holy Friend, that in death, as in life, we are in the hands of a Lover who knows our names and treasures our identity.

Most Holy Friend, for this gift of resurrection life, defined by the very being of Christ Jesus, we give you thanks and praise this day and forever, Amen.

**Notices**

**Birthday Basket**

**Offering and Dedication**

O God, accept and bless these gifts which we offer in response to the gracious gift of your life-giving Spirit to us. May these gifts and our lives be used to flesh out your love and justice, mercy and peace as they are revealed in and through Jesus, your Son and our Saviour. Amen

**Time with the children**  Lazarus

Jesus wept.. it is okay to cry

Shortest verse in Scripture...

Okay to feel sadness... and we have a God who knows that and cries with us

When we hurt Jesus hurts

Packets of tissues –hand out

How do we reach out to someone crying =be with –and that is what Jesus does

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Song:** I the Lord of sea and sky

***Children leave for young church programme***

**Powerpoint Reflection:** Psalm 130

**Bible Reading:** Ezekiel 37:1-14

***The Historical Situation:****In 597 BCE, an enemy army uprooted many of God's people and dragged them from Jerusalem into slavery in Babylon, over 1200 kms away. Thus began the period known as the Babylonian Captivity, or simply the Exile. Amidst the exiles' painful experience, Ezekiel's compatriots had been saying, "It's going to get better soon. We'll get to go home. This will all be over shortly." But Ezekiel had to warn them that things were actually going to get much worse before they got better. And so it did. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem in 587. Their hopes died. It is in this desolate context, the prophet Ezekiel utters his vision of the dry bones.*

**Prayer of Confession**

We have been reminded of the way your people were, Lord God, –feeling trapped there in Babylon, in exile and hurting. Remembering how you had worked in the past. Remembering how they had once felt your presence. Then looking at their current reality and wondering how they would ever get back to that sacred place. For surely as you had done in the past, you would do again in the future.

And this prophet has the audacity to disagree... to say now, here in this new place, God would do a new thing. Life would come where least expected. This was no comfortable promise of a return to what once was.

This was an audacious promise of life giving in the midst of this new reality that feels so lifeless and far from God.

And in resonance with the exiles, we come to You in confession.

For we too have often wanted you to work in the ways of old...

We have looked at what you have done in our lives and expected the same for the future. Or we think the way you have worked in our lives must surely be the way you will work in our neighbour.

And so we unwillingly seek to confine you, to keep you bound.

And so we offer ourselves as a people in exile...

We offer ourselves in all our dryness and lifelessness

In all our complaining about what is...

We confess that we do not live into the promise of life.

Forgive us for chasing empty promises and wealthy dreams,

and turn us back to Your ways.

Bring us new life in this strange new place we find ourselves...

Forgive us for assuming we are alone, when we are not

Forgive us for confining your movement and activity in our world

Breathe into our humanity, loving God, that we may fully live.

Please breathe your Spirit in our brains,

that our decision making may be pure and wise.

Breathe your Spirit on our lips,

that our speech may witness to life and light and holy joy.

Breathe your Spirit on our hands,

that in their busyness they may serve you before all else.

Breathe your Spirit on our feet,

that we may tread this earth with gentleness and respect.

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

 In the words of the Psalmist. If you, God, kept records on wrongdoings,
    who would stand a chance?

But as it turns out, forgiveness is your habit.

And so we take time this morning to know that we are forgiven

For forgiveness is your habit Lord.

We are forgiven, and new life is breathed upon us this day and each new day,

And we are thankful, Amen.

**Song:** Ten thousand reasons (Bless the Lord)

**Bible Reading:** John 11:1-45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMdCQ5vwU8E>

**Sermon** Making Disciples 4: Jesus and Lazarus

**Prayers of Intercession**

Source of life, God of love, let your salvation surround those who walk under the shadow of death.

Be close to those who are dying –give them your peace.

Be close to people who caught up in the rawness of a new grief. Enable them to weep well, free from bitterness or despair.

Be close to all who care for the dying; in hospitals or at home, in a hospice or on a battlefield; give them your quiet strength.

Be close to those who fight against untimely death.

-Those who spend their days working for the elimination of diseases; the carnage on our highways, and the madness of warfare.

Great Spirit-Friend, come with your life and light.

And Lord we pray for those who feel full of breath and new life

may we give thanks and celebrate with them.

We pray for your people everywhere, God.

may we wait in solidarity with them for your word of comfort and hope.

Be close to the preachers of the gospel of peace. By your tireless Spirit, may inadequate words take flesh and become powerful agents in helping people to begin living eternal life now. Through Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.

**Communion Hymn:**  Breathe on me breath of God

**Communion**

The Lord be with you.
***And also with you.*** Lift up your hearts.
***We lift them to the Lord.***Let us give thanks to God.
***It is right to give God our thanks and praise.***Living God, we offer our thanks and praise to you;
creator of heaven and earth, lover of all humanity.
You revealed that love when you heard
your people’s cries of pain and rescued them from slavery.
You fed them and gave them water to drink in the wilderness,
as you led them to freedom and a new way of life.

When the people turned away from you ,
forgetting the great things you had done,
you spoke through the prophets of a new thing
you were about to do.
And in the fullness of time, you broke into our history
in the person of Jesus Christ -
the new and greatest sign of all of your love.
And so, with all the company of heaven and earth
we praise your holy name saying:
***Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest***Holy God, this meal which we share today
is indeed evidence of your love for the world
love revealed in Jesus, your Son, our Lord.
He emptied himself of self and filled himself with others.
Through his life and sacrificial love, he graced lives with
healing and hope, with compassion and power
and as if that were not enough, he gave his very life for us.
On the night of his betrayal, as he sat at the table and broke
bread with his friends, he said:
‘Take and eat; this is my body which is broken for you.
Remember me each time you do this.’
After they had eaten, he took the cup, and said:
‘Remember me as you drink from this,
for it is my life, poured out for you -
the beginning of a new relationship with God.’

God of all power, we praise you for these signs of your everlasting love
and pray that you will breathe your Holy Spirit upon us,
and upon these gifts of bread and wine, that they may be for us
the life of Christ and that we may make that life visible through
our faithful witness to him. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

**Breaking the Bread**
We break this bread and take this cup
so that we can all share in the life of Christ.
God’s gifts for God’s people.

**Distribution**
**Prayer**
Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for making this no ordinary meal. It has been one in which we have been fed and nourished with your life. May we go from here, refreshed and eager, to share your life and love with others. Amen

**Hymn:** Amazing Grace (my chains fell off)

**Benediction and sung Amen**

May God bless you and keep you,

May the Spirit smile upon you and be gracious unto you.

And may Christ send his own light upon you and give you his peace.

Amen!

# John 11:1-45New International Reader's Version (NIRV)

**11**A man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village where Mary and her sister Martha lived. **2**Mary would later pour perfume on the Lord. She would also wipe Jesus’ feet with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick in bed. **3**So the sisters sent a message to Jesus. “Lord,” they told him, “the one you love is sick.”

**4**When Jesus heard this, he said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory. God’s Son will receive glory because of it.” **5**Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6**So after he heard Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. **7**And then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

**8**“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short time ago the Jews there tried to kill you with stones. Are you still going back?”

**9**Jesus answered, “Aren’t there 12 hours of daylight? Anyone who walks during the day won’t trip and fall. They can see because of this world’s light. **10**But when they walk at night, they’ll trip and fall. They have no light.”

**11**After he said this, Jesus went on speaking to them. “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep,” he said. “But I am going there to wake him up.”

**12**His disciples replied, “Lord, if he’s sleeping, he will get better.” **13**Jesus had been speaking about the death of Lazarus. But his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

**14**So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. **15**For your benefit, I am glad I was not there. Now you will believe. But let us go to him.”

**16**Then Thomas, who was also called Didymus, spoke to the rest of the disciples. “Let us go also,” he said. “Then we can die with Jesus.”

**17**When Jesus arrived, he found out that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. **18**Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem. **19**Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary. They had come to comfort them because their brother was dead. **20**When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him. But Mary stayed at home.

**21**“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “I wish you had been here! Then my brother would not have died. **22**But I know that even now God will give you anything you ask for.”

**23**Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

**24**Martha answered, “I know he will rise again. This will happen when people are raised from the dead on the last day.”

**25**Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if they die. **26**And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

**27**“Yes, Lord,” she replied. “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God. I believe that you are the one who is supposed to come into the world.”

**28**After she said this, she went back home. She called her sister Mary to one side to talk to her. “The Teacher is here,” Martha said. “He is asking for you.” **29**When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. **30**Jesus had not yet entered the village. He was still at the place where Martha had met him. **31**Some Jews had been comforting Mary in the house. They noticed how quickly she got up and went out. So they followed her. They thought she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

**32**Mary reached the place where Jesus was. When she saw him, she fell at his feet. She said, “Lord, I wish you had been here! Then my brother would not have died.”

**33**Jesus saw her crying. He saw that the Jews who had come along with her were crying also. His spirit became very sad, and he was troubled. **34**“Where have you put him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

**35**Jesus wept.

**36**Then the Jews said, “See how much he loved him!”

**37**But some of them said, “He opened the eyes of the blind man. Couldn’t he have kept this man from dying?”

**38**Once more Jesus felt very sad. He came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone in front of the entrance. **39**“Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad smell. Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days.”

**40**Then Jesus said, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believe, you will see God’s glory?”

**41**So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up. He said, “Father, I thank you for hearing me. **42**I know that you always hear me. But I said this for the benefit of the people standing here. I said it so they will believe that you sent me.”

**43**Then Jesus called in a loud voice. He said, “Lazarus, come out!” **44**The dead man came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen. A cloth was around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the clothes he was buried in and let him go.”

**45**Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did. So they believed in him.

**Sermon**

So here we are at the last of the 4 Lenten sermons on Making Disciples... we have looked at the way Jesus related to Nicodemus, and the woman from Samaria and the man born blind. And today we are looking at the way Jesus related to Lazarus and his sisters. It is another of those long stories of John’s gospel.

It is a story about a family who Jesus spent a lot of time with –he was ministered to by these three siblings –Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And they spent a lot of time together. For Jesus, their home in Bethany was a place of retreat –a place to call home.

It is this Mary who had anointed Jesus with anointment and wiped his feet with her hair... this Martha who learned to sit at Jesus’ feet as a disciple.

And in this part of their story, we enter into a typical family tragedy...

Lazarus gets really, really sick -and his sisters are worried –so they send a message to their dear friend Jesus, your friend Lazarus is really ill. It is the kind of tragedy that is repeated in families over and over again.

But this is not just a story of a tragedy that stands alone –for John the Gospel writer, this is the story that precipitates the death of Jesus. This is the final straw for those watching him –this display of power over life and death -this show of ultimate power.... is too threatening for his onlookers. He must be got rid of.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

I think sometimes I read these stories with too much familiarity –I know what is coming, so I don’t linger in what the text actually says. It is like watching the new Beauty and the Beast movie –I can keep telling myself as Belle’s father is locked away, or the wolves are striking.... or the Beast attacked, that all is going to be well.... I know how it ends... But this week as I lingered in the Lazarus story, I noticed all the gaps. -Gaps of silence; gaps of waiting; gaps of nothingness.

It is a long story –it took 8 minutes for us to watch. A story that I suspect often mirrors our own stories. -Times of weeping with breaking hearts. -Times when we wonder where God is and why he is not present. -Time when God remains silent.

I leap forward to the bit of the story where Jesus is there at the tomb, calling Lazarus to come out. The amazing dramatic moment of this bound man staggering out, encumbered by the bandages that had wrapt his dead body. But this is 4 whole days after Lazarus had died... and if we race straight to this part of the story, we have missed a heck of a lot.

There are lots of other people involved in this story. Jesus is with the disciples in an unnamed place –presumably a day’s walk from Bethany, when he gets news of Lazarus’ illness. It is a strange part of the story when Jesus decides to do nothing. His good friend is dying, and he is silent. He waits. He does other things that we are not told about.

We think of death as urgent. But ultimately, death is the end of urgency –it is our own pain that makes it seem that urgent care is necessary. And our pain does not go away quickly.

The disciples seem to assume that he is not going near Jerusalem because it is too dangerous for him. So when Jesus finally says he is going to go to Lazarus, they question him –why would you do that if the authorities there will try and kill you. It is Thomas –who we too often link with doubt, who leads the others in standing bravely alongside Jesus –if he goes, then so do we –even if it means we too will be killed.

This is no simple trip.

And by the time Jesus chooses to head to Bethany, Lazarus is well and truly dead -4 days dead. And the 4 days is significant because it was commonly believed that the soul remained in the body for up to three days. Beyond that, the body was absolutely beyond hope.

Many people had come from Jerusalem to grieve alongside his 2 sisters.

When Martha hears Jesus is coming to Bethany, she rushes out on the road to meet him. In true Martha form, she complains about his lateness... whilst also declaring that nothing could now be done because the opportunity has been lost. She is indignant, pragmatic, matter-of-fact. There is a certain reserve, but she is sure of what she knows.

Jesus talks with her. He tells her that Lazarus will rise again. Martha understands this to be referring to the last days when all will rise –and she assures him that yes she understands this. Jesus then tells her he is the resurrection and the life –and again she agrees –yes Lord, you are the Messiah. It is a conversation of hope for a time to come, but Martha still needs to attend to her own immediate grief –and back she goes to deal with all the mourners visiting her and Mary. She gets home and tells Mary that Jesus has arrived and wants to see her.

Mary zooms off to see him –leaving all the visitors to assume she is heading to the grave to mourn and so they follow her.

She runs to Jesus and falls at his feet –passionately weeping –saying Lord, if you had only been here my brother would not have died. Her disappointment is all apparent. Why had he left it so late? Why hadn’t he been here and done something? Why had she been left alone? Why had he been silent?

Jesus sees all this pain –of Mary, of the others following her... and he becomes deeply sad and troubled. He asks where Lazarus has been put and they reply, come and see. And Jesus weeps.

He meets Mary in the midst of her deep pain, and he cries with her.

It is a sign of deep love.

But it is confusing for those watching –trying to understand why he has not done something to make it better.

And in this deep sadness, we read he goes up to the tomb’s entrance and says “Take away the stone”.

There is still no indication of making things better... just a deep sense of grief.

And so they respond –but there will be a terrible smell... he has been in there 4 days. And Jesus replies about seeing God’s glory. It must all be feeling pretty weird at this point.

They take away the stone –no easy task... and you can imagine the mounting anticipation. No one does this.

And then finally, in verse 43, Jesus yells out –Lazarus, come out!

Imagine the moment –as this wrapped figure staggers out, a grave cloth still over his face.

Take off the grave clothes and set him free.

It is that awesome moment that we can only begin to imagine –when death is no longer –when life is given back.

And somehow we can get to that bit if the story and say phew, it is all okay –Jesus fixed it. And we can conveniently forget what led up to it.

But the reality is that early part of the story is important –it niggles away at us...

For it is just as much a part of our story as the wonder of life over death.

-The reality of the gaps –the silences, where we do not know if God is part of our story at all. -Because God seems to have a habit of being silent. There is often a lot of silence before the Word speaks. Silence seems to be part of the habit of God.

Long silences, with times of sobbing, interrupted by the usual trite sayings that come in grief... and then more silence.

And for those who know me well ,they know that I like things done yesterday –I am not very patient –and I am not very good at waiting...

But Jesus is in no hurry here.

He hears Lazarus is really ill and he does nothing. Why doesn’t he leap up and go straight to them. Doesn’t he know that that is Pastoral Care 101 –when someone is dying, it becomes the priority. You drop everything.

But Jesus waits –we don’t even hear what he spends his time doing instead.

What is more important than his dying friend?

Why leave all this space for pain? Why delay doing good? Why postpone goodness?

And it seems to me –as impatient as I am, that God does a lot of this –expecting the people to wait... 400 years of slavery in Egypt; 40 years in the wilderness...

I suspect there are many people of God whose first response was probably –it’s about time you showed up!

And still today, people wait for God to show up... and hear nothing.

It seems that in this story we discover that the silence of God is as much part of the conversation as the words of God spoken in response to our tears, our deep, deep sorrow, that bring us back to life.

Discipleship is not something filled with words. It is not something we are in control of. It is not something we always understand clearly.

Grace is gift, and gifts are not predictable. God moves in God’s time.

Jesus is not someone who shows up on command.

And yet, when the Word of God does speak, they are the words of freedom spoken to the very one we have given up on as beyond help.

At the time we say there is no hope, the Word of hope speaks.

At the time we are done with waiting, we are answered.

And so we are given our agenda in this world.

Our work as disciples, in the long silence of God, is to unbind what we thought was dead and set it free.

-Because it seems that God is most at work, where and when we have given up hope. God enters the very places where we see no hope, and offers life.

The places where all we perceive is the stench of death... the places we have closed off, bordered up. -Rolled rocks across, so we do not have to face its reality.

And Jesus calls us to open it up –to face the bound figure of our fear, and find new life there.

*Making disciples is not necessarily about dropping everything –although it is about the willingness to enter into the real pain of others and weep with them. It is about being in the silences as well as the speaking; being in the places where we have no control. It is about facing the stench of death and bravely unbinding to find the miracle of healing. It is about allowing for God’s timing and not seeking control for ourselves.*

And as we unpack this text further in the week ahead, may we be blessed with abundant life that surprises and challenges our assumptions and leads us closer to Jesus. So be it, Amen.



***Image: Raising of Lazarus***. Mid 12th century. Cappella Palatina di Palermo, Italy. Vanderbilt Divinity School Library, Art in the Christian Tradition.