

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 30th April 2023

prepared by the Revd Kate Cambridge

As we worship today, our service will look at the story of the raising of Lazarus and invite us to consider this story in the light of our own lives and those of our church communities. Just as Lazarus was called out of the darkness of the tomb to new life, so we have been called to new life and into a new community of hope as God's people. What does this community look like and what kind of people is God calling us to be?

1 Peter 2.9-10 reads: *'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'*

Our first hymn reminds us of the inclusive nature of the church. It talks about building a 'house' but the church is so much more than the building. Our Service at Home sheet is a reminder that not all of us can gather in a church building on a Sunday but we are all included and part of God's Church.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF 409

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhPnjA7wsIY>

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions;

All are welcome,

All are welcome,

All are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

All are welcome...

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground,
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

All are welcome...

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

All are welcome...

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All are welcome...

Marty Haugen (b. 1950)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

In the silence of this moment, before we move on,
we take time to rest in your presence, O God. You
reach out to us in your love and welcome us into
your kingdom, members of the people of God. We
join people from every nation and across the ages
and recognise that, in you, we are family. In you we
are forgiven, redeemed and made holy. Through
your Spirit, you challenge us and change us, we are
renewed, refreshed and sent out in your name.

Together we stand as testimony to your all-
encompassing love, as those who have received
mercy and, through your compassion and grace,
have been counted part of the people of God.

Forgive us Lord, for the times when we have been
blind to your love.

Forgive us where we have excluded others and
judged those who are different.

Forgive us where we have wounded those you
would have us welcome.

Forgive us for the divisions that arise between us,
when we are not united in you.

Forgive us – and open our eyes to our shortcomings and failings, that we might turn to you again, repent and be healed.

As you forgive us, remake us again in your image, that as your people we might be true witnesses to your love. Give us your heart for your people and help us to love as Jesus has loved us.

In his name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the Readings

In our gospel reading, Jesus has travelled to Bethany, to the village of his friends Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus. Despite hearing that Lazarus was unwell, Jesus stayed away a few more days. When he finally arrived in Bethany, his friend was already dead.

Read John 11 v 17-44

Reflection

This week I read a wonderful story in the news about a woman who needed a kidney transplant. Lucy Humphrey was having dialysis and given only 5 years to live unless she found a kidney donor. The odds of a match, according to doctors, were 1 in 22 million. However, a chance encounter with a woman on a beach led to the life saving operation and a new start for Lucy. If you have internet access, you can read the full story here:

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/a-stranger-i-met-at-the-beach-gave-me-her-kidney/ar-AA1aewEV>

Lucy and her partner described this as a chance encounter – they weren't even going to go to the beach that day. What if their decision had been different? Their lives were changed for the better because of one chance decision that they made.

It is good to hear a positive news story. The question 'what if' is one that many of us have asked at some point in our lives. 'If' I hadn't gone to that Christian Union party when at University, I would not have met my husband. What are the 'what if' moments in your life? Small decisions and brief moments can have life-changing consequences.

Of course, 'what if' moments are frequently causes of sorrow and lament for people too. Split second decisions can lead to heartache and regret. Perhaps you can identify some of those moments in your life too.

When Lazarus died, both his sisters believed that things could have been different. You can hear their words of sorrow and accusation – perhaps even anger - when they said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' (v. 21, 32). Jesus delayed coming – and their brother was now laid in the tomb. Others also asked, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' (v. 37).

It is important to pause at this question before we move on. We are not always good at 'lament', yet the Bible and particularly the Psalms contain many words lamenting what might have been, words which cry out to God and ask the difficult questions. Most of these Psalms move on to faith and to trust in God – but this raw honesty and the real questions are a vital part of this faith. Martha and Mary were brave in their honesty – they did not mask their pain or confusion. I wonder whether we might spend more time as a church collectively lamenting the impact the recent years have had on our ministry, as we seek to rebuild and look to the future? For Lazarus, this was not the end of the story, yet Jesus too was 'greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved' and wept with Mary (v. 33, 35).

Grief is not always rational – and I wonder if Jesus' friends and the surrounding crowds questioned his reason when, again greatly disturbed, Jesus told them to 'take away the stone.' Did he want to see his beloved friend one last time and say his goodbyes? Had he forgotten that, four days after death, in the heat of the Middle East, the body would be decomposing? He replied on being questioned, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' (v. 40)

There is another 'what if' I would like to ask at this point. What if Mary and Martha decided that it was

too late and the tomb remained closed? What if their concern over the smell, or looking foolish, prevented them from listening to and trusting Jesus? Would the story have ended there? They had a choice to make and they could either close the door to future possibilities – or take a risk. They took that risk and Jesus, giving thanks to God, cried, 'Lazarus, come out!' Lazarus came out, alive, from the tomb! Did Lazarus have a choice, I wonder – to rest in the darkness of the tomb, or step out into the light? Who was more amazed – the onlookers, as they unbound him from the burial cloths, or Lazarus himself?

What a wonderful story of hope and life following death, which points us to the one who died for us at Easter and was raised to new resurrection life. Lazarus would one day die again – Jesus lives forevermore and we live with him.

We cannot change the past, but it is important to acknowledge it, to take time to grieve over what might have been, to weep with those who weep. What the story of Lazarus challenges us to do, is not to remain in that place. What if...God is calling us on to new places and new possibilities, to see new life and hope despite the pain of the past?

What if... God hasn't finished with us or the faith communities of which we are a part, but is calling us to hear the voice of Jesus, to step out of our comfort zones and take risks for him - to remove the things which hold us back and move forward in faith and life and hope?

May our hearts be opened to the new possibilities that await us, may we look to the future with faith as we ask that question in our own lives and in our churches – and listen for God's answer. What if...?

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

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

In the dark and all alone, growing comfortable
Are you too scared to move and walk out of this tomb?

Buried underneath, the lies that you believed
Safe and sound, stuck in the ground
Too lost to be found
You're just asleep and it's time to leave

Come on and rise up, take a breath, you're alive now,
Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
You're brand new, the power of death couldn't hold you,
Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
Rise up, rise up, rise up
Out from the grave like Lazarus

When He said your name, the thing that filled your veins,
was more than blood, it's the kind of love that washes sin away
Now the door is open wide and the stones been rolled aside,
the old is gone, the Light has come, so

Come on and rise up, take a breath, you're alive now,
can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
You're brand new, the power of death couldn't hold you,
can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
Rise up (like Lazarus) rise up, rise up
Out from the grave like Lazarus

He's calling us to walk out of the dark
He's giving us new resurrected hearts, oh-whoa
He's calling us to walk out of the dark
He's giving us new resurrected hearts, oh

Come on and rise up, take a breath, you're alive now,
can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
You're brand new, the power of death couldn't hold you,
can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
Rise up (He's calling you out, no) rise up
Get me up from the grave like Lazarus

Rise up (You don't have to stay there)
Rise up (oh, we hear You calling)
Rise up (calling us, calling us)
Out from the grave like Lazarus

Logan Cain, Ethan Hulse, Nick Schwarz, Taylor Matz, Madison Jonson.

Prayers of Intercession

Come Lord, like the wind, move us, direct us.
Come as the breath, fill us, refresh us.
Come to your Church which without you is dull and dry,
and fill us with your Spirit.
Call us out of death and darkness into life and light.

We pray for the renewal of your Church in its devotion and mission, for all who proclaim your life-giving powers and share in your redeeming love. Come, Lord, restore, renew,
revive your people.

We pray for all whose hope is lost, who feel cut off from life, for refugees and displaced peoples, for all who flee from oppression and tyranny, for all who are made homeless, for all who have suffered abuse or violence. Come, Lord, restore, renew,
revive your people.

We pray for areas of bad housing where communities have broken down or have died. We pray for friends and loved ones who are worn out, for relationships that are in danger of dying. Come, Lord, restore, renew,
revive your people.

We pray for all who are ill, for all who are in weakness, for all who are bereaved. We remember all who have given up on life. We pray for the disturbed, the mentally ill, all who walk in darkness and the shadow of death. We pray for all who suffer torture or violence. Come, Lord, restore, renew,
revive your people.

We give thanks for all who set us an example of love and vitality and who have now entered your greater glory. May we be inspired by their lives and seek to live to your praise and glory. Come, Lord, restore, renew,
revive your people.

David Adam, *'Clouds and Glory'* p. 54

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.

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

Life giving God, we offer ourselves once again to you, in our brokenness and frailty, with our questions and our doubts. Take us and the gifts we give in your service, and use us for the glory of your name. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF 415

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGG9ht_wzK0

The Church of Christ in every age
beset by change but Spirit led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live until they die.

Then let the servant Church arise,
a caring Church that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,
and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,
can cure the fever in our blood,
and teach us how to share our bread
and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve
in full obedience to our Lord:
to care for all, without reserve,
and spread his liberating Word.

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000) Words ©1971, Stainer & Bell Ltd.

Closing Blessing

May you find in Christ crucified
a strength in times of darkness,
a support in times of weakness,
and the assurance that life is eternal;
And the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you now and for evermore, Amen.

Blessing taken from David Adams, 'Clouds and Glory' p. 55

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