

Dear Friends

Bulletin for Sunday 29th March 2020

Welcome to our Bulletin of worship for this Sunday. Wherever and whenever works for you, I hope we can all feel connected in thought and prayer, in affection and concern. The church is not the building, it's us; and nobody can cancel faith; or hope; or love.

The Bible readings for this Sunday are Ezekiel 37: 1-14 (about the valley of dry bones, which God caused to live again) and John 11: 1-45 (about the raising of Lazarus).

Reading the story of Lazarus' illness and death this week I feel appallingly sorry for Martha and Mary. Their brother is dying and their one, desperate, hope is that Jesus might be able to get there in time to help him. But Lazarus gets sicker and sicker, and still Jesus doesn't come. Eventually he dies, and his exhausted and grief-stricken sisters are comforted by the neighbours.... Yet when Jesus does, finally, arrive, far too late, it turns out not to be too late. The words Jesus shouts into the tomb, just like the words Ezekiel used in the valley of dry bones, miraculously bring life.

This story can be read as a parable when life falls apart, and we wonder where God is. It suggests that Jesus is present, in his love and concern, even when he feels absent. He does not forget us or ignore us, but weeps with us; and he has the power, if we let him, to unbind us - from our fears and our doubts - and let us go. Amen

Prayer (based on one in Roots)

Compassionate God

To all those who are alone and feel isolated from community:
be a loving companion.

To children who can't play with their friends, and feel anxious:
be a reassuring hand to hold.

To those who are ill or concerned about loved ones, and to those who are grieving:
bring healing and comfort.

To decision makers and all in authority:
give wisdom and compassion.

To neighbours and all who seek to help others:
give strength and understanding.

For those who work in the health service, and those who care for us:
we give thanks and ask your blessing.

In the name of Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life.

Amen

Hymns

Some of the hymns I would choose to help reflect on these readings, particularly in our present circumstances, are:

'Come down, O love divine', (294 in Rejoice and Sing) which is about the power of the Holy Spirit within us, and has been sung for about 600 years! Personally I think the tune, 'Down Ampney' by Vaughan Williams is absolutely beautiful.

'Spirit of the Living God, move among us all', (RS 309) which speaks of the practical effects of a whole community receiving the Spirit of God.

and, most importantly, 'What a friend I have in Jesus', (RS 413) whose reminder of the importance and comfort of prayer is a source of great comfort. It concentrates, however, very much on the individual in trouble and in prayer, hence my wish to balance it with other more communal hymns such as 309, above.

I have heard during the week that several members with pianos were able to play through the hymns last week, which is great. It's worth mentioning for those of you with online access, that not only will a quick search usually bring you the words of hymns, but in many cases it will also provide links to Youtube clips of them being sung, beautifully. I've been asked whether we are lighting candles in our windows again this Sunday evening. This was a one-off initiative as far as I know, but there is nothing to stop any (or all) of us doing the same again, thinking and praying for everyone as we did last week.

News of our church family this week -

I have appreciated talking to many of you by phone over the last few days - it's good to hear familiar voices and to learn that you are well and enjoying the sunshine and the increasing birdsong. There are some birds - sparrows, I think - nesting in the Manse hedge, which I shall love keeping an eye on. Karen's daily walk often takes her past here too, so we have exercised our lungs with some distant, shouted conversations!

Audrey's funeral has now been arranged for 9th April (Maundy Thursday). Obviously at the moment very few people are allowed to be present, so I would encourage you to hold her, her family and her many friends in your prayers specifically at that time, as I shall do myself. After this is all over and we can meet together again, we will organise services for Audrey and for John, to give us a chance to share together in remembering them and to celebrate and give thanks for their lives.

I have also had a message from Derek, expressing his thanks and appreciation for the thoughts and prayers of our congregations after the death of his wife, Anne. He and his family also hope to organise a service of thanksgiving once the restrictions are lifted.

A reminder that I can only share news I know about - I'm available by phone or email, see below, and would love to hear from you (even if you don't have any exciting news!). And don't forget to phone each other, too - a familiar voice is a great way to cheer people up.

Blessings

