***Christ Church, Ipswich***

***Thought for the Week***

***With Revd Neil Coulson***

**Sunday 29th March 2020**

**Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Hello, I hope you are well and are managing to adjust to all the necessary changes to your normal life. You and you loved ones are very much in my thoughts and prayers at the moment. As we worship together this week, we gather around a no doubt familiar story, that of Jesus raising Lazarus to life in John 11:1-45, which is our Gospel Reading for the Fifth Sunday in Lent this year.

Let us worship God together:

**Call to Worship**

Come and worship the Resurrection God,

The Lord of all creation,

Who is always present, no matter what.

Worship him today in spirit and truth.

**O for a thousand tongues to sing**

(Let’s sing or read this hymn)

1 O For a thousand tongues to sing  
my great Redeemer's praise,  
the glories of my God and King,  
the triumphs of His grace.

2 Jesus. the name that charms our fears,  
that bids our sorrows cease;  
'tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'tis life, and health, and peace.

3 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
his blood can make the foulest clean,  
his blood availed for me.

4 He speaks, and, listening to his voice,  
new life the dead receive;  
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;  
the humble poor believe.

5 Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,  
your loosened tongues employ;  
ye blind, behold your Saviour come,  
and leap, ye lame, for joy!

6 My gracious Master and my God,  
assist me to proclaim,  
to spread through all the earth abroad  
the honours of thy name.

Charles Wesley (1707-88) CCLI 181784

**A Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving**

Thank you, Lord, for your constant presence.  
Thank you for holding us and comforting us.  
Thank you for crying with us when we are hurting.  
Thank you for weeping with us when we are broken-hearted.  
Thank you, Lord, that you never let us down,  
that you always give us hope.  
God of new life,   
we give you thanks and praise today.  
Amen.

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

**Reflection**

In the story of Lazarus, we discover that Jesus delays his journey and remarkably, he arrives well after the funeral of Lazarus has taken place. His friends had put a call out for him to come. He was their friend. He was also their hope. But he didn’t arrive, he wasn’t there, he was absent. Of course, eventually, Jesus does arrive and then the one who is ‘the resurrection and the life’ brings resurrection to Lazarus, but we can’t avoid the fact that when Mary and Martha first reached out to him, he didn’t arrive on time.

Fascinatingly, we can see this theme of Jesus’ physical absence throughout the Gospel of John (John 7:33ff, 13:33ff, 14:1, 27-28, 16:2-3, 19-22). So we could read the story of Lazarus’s raising as a poignant parable for those times when we want to know where Jesus is as life is falling apart. Perhaps, for some of us, this is such a time! Certainly, I know that’s how I often feel about the sadness that surrounds us. Like in the earlier story of the healing of the Royal Official’s son (4:46-54), read as a parable, there is a strong suggestion that Jesus is present even in his absence.

Let’s use our imagination here and what do we then discover? We find Jesus carrying his concern for the Bethany family from the moment he hears about his beloved friend’s illness, even though he is not able to act immediately out of concern for safety. We find that Jesus’ faith carries him through the risks and dangers of the journey to Bethany and into the place of loss and death (11:4, 9-15, 25). We find that the words Jesus bellows into Lazarus’ sealed tomb are powerfully creative and life-giving. Now just imagine this: If Jesus brings life in circumstances as dire as these, how much more is the crucified and risen Lord the solid ground of hope in the face of every fear and in all sad loss.

May I encourage you to remember this: Jesus is *always* present even in his absence. Amen.

**There is a Redeemer**

There is a redeemer

Jesus, God's own Son

Precious Lamb of God, Messiah

Holy One,

*Thank you, O my Father,*

*for* [*giving*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/giving) *us your Son,*

*and* [*leaving*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/leaving) *your Spirit*

*till the work on* [*Earth*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/Earth) *is done.*

Jesus, my Redeemer

name [above](https://www.definitions.net/definition/above) all names,

precious Lamb of God, Messiah,

O, for [sinners](https://www.definitions.net/definition/sinners) slain.

*Thank you, O my Father…*

When I [stand](https://www.definitions.net/definition/stand) in glory,

I will see His face,

and [there](https://www.definitions.net/definition/there) I'll [serve](https://www.definitions.net/definition/serve) my King forever

in that holy place.

*Thank you, O my Father…*

*Melody Green*

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**Our Prayers**

Let us pray to God,  
who alone makes us dwell in safety:

For all who are affected by coronavirus,  
through illness or isolation or anxiety,  
that they may find relief and recovery:  
Lord, hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

For those who are guiding our nation at this time,  
and shaping national policies,  
that they may make wise decisions:  
Lord, hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

For doctors, nurses, healthcare professionals and medical researchers,  
that through their skill and insights  
many will be restored to health:  
Lord, hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

For the vulnerable and the fearful,  
for the gravely ill and the dying,  
that they may know your comfort and peace:  
Lord, hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

For one another within our Church family at Christ Church

and for those close to us

who are in need at this time:

Lord, hear us,

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,  
to the mercy and protection of God.  
Merciful Father,  
**accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

**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.

**The Blessing**

May the blessing of God Almighty,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

be upon all our lives

and the lives of those we love,

today and always,

Amen.

**The Grace**

(As we say this, let’s imagine we are saying it together, to one another)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

be with us all,

for evermore.

Amen.

May God bless you richly,

Grace and peace,

Neil

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