



Pews News

United Benefice of Shenstone & Stonnall



Passiontide – 29th March 2020

We have certainly seen a great deal of changes this week haven't we? Developments and instructions were at one point changing daily if not hourly. You will all have made adjustments to your way of living, shopping, working, all aspects of your life. Life will be challenging and sometimes confusing for all of us. Our school children are now, most of them, at home. People no longer 'go out to work' they are working at home, with all the new ways of acting that brings with it. We are separated from loved ones, unable to visit elderly relatives or indeed be visited. There is doubt surrounding the access to our usual food shop, something that hasn't had to be thought of in a generation. The fabric and foundations of our lives are shifting all the time, and lives will be changed after all this is done. Once more the readings set for today echo our times. Please stay safe and well.

With all God's Blessings Rev Liz

Please join me for morning prayer on both Facebook pages

A short service of prayer, for Sunday 29th March can be found on our FaceBook pages, St Johns website and our 'A Church Near

Special Prayer for these times

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.

Sustain and support the anxious, be with those who care for the sick,

and lift up all who are brought low; that we may find comfort knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen

Collect Prayer – Passiontide

Gracious Father,

you gave up your Son

out of love for the world:

lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,

that we may know eternal peace through the shedding of our

Saviour's blood,

Jesus Christ our Lord.



News from the Church of England – current as at 27th March 2020

- All public acts of worship and private prayer opportunities within church are suspended until further notice.
- All church activities are suspended until further notice
- Guidance and ruling on conducting weddings and funerals is available on the websites of Lichfield Diocese and The Church of England.
- All church meetings are cancelled, and this includes PCC meetings and the APCM. The new deadline for APCMs and election of Church Wardens is 31st October.
- Pastoral visits in circumstances where people are self-isolating because they are symptomatic or have been in contact with someone who has been symptomatic, should not be undertaken until their isolation ends. However, please do contact me if you need to speak with me.*
- Pastoral visits in circumstances where someone is self-isolating for their protection *may be made if needed*. Strict health and hygiene practices will be used and social distancing maintained.*

*Taken from The Church of England website



Please pray for all those known to us who in need of our prayers and for those mentioned below.

'Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.' Jeremiah 29:12

- We pray for our world, and all in need at this time.
- We pray for our Queen and all the Royal Family, and in particular Prince Charles
- We pray for all our Government, our Bishops and Clergy. We pray especially for the Prime Minister at this time
- Please pray for Paul and Cathy Middleton, one of St John the Baptist's mission partners. Pray their work can continue with the current constraints.
- Many known to us have had much needed surgery and treatment postponed, be with them all at this difficult time.
- Comfort those who have had to rearrange their weddings.
- Draw close to them, sustain and uphold them.

Help and Assistance

We want to make sure everyone in our church and our communities stay safe. If you have any need whatever please contact one of our care coordinators who will their best to find someone to help you.

Graham & Margaret Birt 01543 483138

Di Proctor 01543 480442

Val Neale 01543 374430

Contributions for our local foodbanks.

We will endeavour to continue to support our local foodbanks. Their services will be needed more and more. As our churches are now completely closed we are working hard to find a way for contributions to be collected.

Worship

If we were meeting today, Signs for Worship, Walsall were going to lead our services. We would have been singing and signing

Lord I lift your name on high

Come now is the time to worship

Jesus be the centre

The greatest day in history.

However Signs for Worship have contributed to our recorded service. Two songs are included; Lord I lift your name on high and Jesus be the Centre.

Social Media

Social media is sometimes regarded as Marmite, you either love it or hate it. However at these times its very useful for keeping in contact with each other. If you're able please 'like' either one of the church's FaceBook page. If you've recently set up an email account please email Rev Liz so she has your email address.

Our readings for this Sunday are;

Romans 8:6-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit^l is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are

in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles^[e] away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to

him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.^[f] Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep.³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Thought for today

(Transcript of sermon posted on the churches' Facebook pages)

The gospel reading for today is quite a lengthy one and I did wonder about just reading a part of it, but after much thought decided I'd read it in its entirety. Many of the themes in this gospel come in pairs, light and darkness, life and death, acceptance and rejection, grace and glory, And the gospel is split into two parts and our reading today then is from the end of the first part, the story of Lazarus.

When Jesus heard about Lazarus being sick He waited and many must have wondered like Mary and Martha did, why He didn't immediately come. When He finally arrived after Lazarus had died He told Martha "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this*" (John 11:25-26)? Martha believed in the resurrection but what Jesus was trying to tell her was that one thing, Lazarus would be raised again. When Jesus said "Lazarus, come forth," Lazarus came out of the grave still wrapped in burial cloth. Jesus as God has the power to bring the dead to life and it is all a work of God. Jesus didn't ask Lazarus to participate or say "Lazarus if you'll move your little toe I'll do the rest" Jesus did it all. We couldn't make ourselves come to life any more than Lazarus could.

We then see and hear about how the two sisters, once more act differently. We know of the differences between Martha and Mary from Luke 10.38-42 with Martha being the more direct and practical. She comes straight out to Jesus, and she comes straight out with her feelings in grief: 'if only you'd been here...', she sounds as if she's blaming Jesus doesn't she? She expresses perhaps the universal response to such moments: 'if only' it had been different; 'if only' I hadn't said that; 'if only' we had spent more time...Jesus hears her regrets from the past and points her to hope for the future, a hope that she, along with most of her contemporaries, understood—resurrection to new life at the end of this age when the Messiah came to restore all things.

I wonder how those sisters were really feeling, when their best friend who they believed and knew could help them didn't turn up. I imagine they felt let down, their trust betrayed and of course extremely sad that their brother had died. I imagine they were also confused when they met Jesus and he started to say I am the resurrection and the life, **I am**. I am the one who will help you, I am the one who will sort this out, I am the one you've been waiting for. I am.

Mary and Martha struggled with trust and hope. After all they'd heard Jesus speaking many times, but still they struggled. This moment though at this watershed in John's gospel, as Jesus' time is coming, this is after all the reading for Passiontide, this is when that hope, that promise becomes real and something they can and do believe in. They would of course have been mourning the death of their brother and sad that they would no longer see him but they had those promises to hold on too. We all have the promised given to us that a future of eternal life is for all of us, for those too who have gone before us. When we accept that statement 'I am', those promises become ours. Our lives can be fully transformed and changed. Made new, made alive again.

Jesus too shared their sadness, just as He shares our sadness. After all a good friend of his had died.

However in this story, Jesus had a plan to put things right. Sometimes when we can't see Jesus, we think He's not there. Sometimes when we think all is lost we can think he's not there, sometimes when we're in challenging times and we wonder who is actually in charge, we think he's not there. But he is . But He's working for us, always. His words give us hope. Remember he said – *I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me will live, even though they die.*

In times like now we can be fearful and afraid of what is in store for us. We can wonder what is going on, but at the end of all of this we will be changed and changed for the better. When Lazarus came out of the tomb after all his challenges, after that particular meeting, he was a very different man. He would have been like a butterfly coming out of the cocoon, made new and renewed, revived and restored. We will be too, remember Jesus is here no matter what we may feel or think..

Please stay safe and well. If you need help please do not hesitate to contact Rev Liz. She will try to find the help you need.

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