

For 10 am Sunday 29 March 2020 - online worship from Knox Church, Dunedin, New Zealand – for the fifty Sunday of Lent

It can be accessed from the Knox Church YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYksSjG0If00NeogNIGs7A>.

or from the Knox Church website – <https://knoxchurch.net/>

Pre-service music from Ariana Knudson-Hollebon starting around 9.50am

10am Welcome

Welcome to worship at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand. Naumai. Haere mai. Because of COVID-19, we are all in lockdown. So this service has been filmed in the homes of people across the city. I am Kerry Enright, the minister of Knox Church. I am grateful for the many people who have put this service together. And it is so good to have you with us. Let us begin.

to worship

(from Call Psalm 130, the psalm for the day) (adapted from Doug Gay)

I am waiting for God, my soul waits and I hope in God's word.

My soul waits for God, more than those who watch for the dawn.

I wait and watch for God, more than those who watch for the morning to come.

All God's People - Hope in Your God, God's love will not fail.

The theme of our service today is about the presence of Christ in our most dire circumstances. We hear Jesus describe himself as the resurrection and the life. Our first hymn reflects that theme and is from the Church of Scotland Church Hymnary 4, **Now the green blade riseth**

Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,

wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;

love lives again, that with the dead has been:

Love is come again,

like wheat that sprineth green.

In the grave they laid him, Love whom men had slain,

thinking that never he would wake again,

laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen: *Love ...*

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,

thy touch can call us back to life again,

fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been: *Love ...*

Prayer

God of all, you see each of us spread across the globe, confined in our homes or hotel rooms, in our flats or on our farms, some far away from those they love. We are a people confined, but with a spirit of care for each other and a desire to protect the life of others. We praise you for your parental care that stretches to embrace us all. We praise you for your humanity in Christ who understands our thoughts and experiences our challenges. We praise you for your Spirit who brings life to even the most confined. Triune God, all praise to you. What mixed emotions we have. The prospect of time at home seems like space for some. The isolation feels like fear to others. We are conscious of how tense we are. And we are thoughtful about those who have lost jobs or income, whose businesses have closed, whose plans have been upended

or whose health puts them at risk. Forgive us our reactivity and expand our graciousness, In Christ we pray. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness and the sharing of peace - E te whanau, know that because of what God has done in Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Kia tau tonu te rangimarie o te Ariki ki a koutou. The peace of Christ be with us all.

Children - Jordan Redding

Readings

Rachel Tombs

Ezekiel 37:1-14

John 11:1-45

11:1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

11:2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill.

11:3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

11:4 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."

11:5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,

11:6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

11:7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

11:8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?"

11:9 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.

11:10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."

11:11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him."

11:12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right."

11:13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

11:14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.

11:15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

11:16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

11:17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

11:18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away,

11:19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

11:20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

11:21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

11:22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

11:24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,

11:26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

11:27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

11:28 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."

11:29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

11:30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

11:31 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.

11:32 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."

11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

11:34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

11:35 Jesus began to weep.

11:36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

11:37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

11:38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

11:39 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."

11:40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

11:41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me.

11:42 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."

11:43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

11:44 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."

11:45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Anthem - Calla Knudson-Hollebon sings "*I know that my redeemer liveth*" from *Handel's Messiah*

Reflection

Thank you Rachel for that reading, and thank you Calla for that wonderful music. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock and redeemer. Amen. Now to a reflection on the gospel.

Imagine going into your kitchen and finding the lid has blown off your pressure cooker or your food processor and the contents are splattered everywhere – ceiling, walls, floor, even the light shades – it happened and I can remember. Your well-ordered, tidy and clean kitchen has changed colour. Its an utter mess, and that food in a crevice you didn't notice will begin to smell one day.

The gospel reading today has that feel to it. Its all over the place; what one person calls the wildest story in all of scripture. It's like a Breughel painting, a montage of encounters.

The sound of people wailing and weeping. The smell of a body four days dead. Sisters grieving because their brother has died. An angry family demanding treatment – now! And Martha accusing Jesus of neglecting his friend at the moment of his greatest need. Then Lazarus comes forth still bound in his burial clothes. Here is a family – Martha, Mary and Lazarus - with a close family friend Jesus, being utterly raw in the face of death and its power.

And what of Jesus? We start with a casual Jesus – “This illness does not lead to death”, he says, as if it doesn't matter. Then he heads away from Lazarus to Judea – a kind of self-isolating from grief perhaps. Then he uses concepts no one will ever fully comprehend – “I am the resurrection and the life”. But then when he sees Mary weeping, he responds by being “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved”. In the Greek, the word means angry. Jesus is angry at the pain and grief death causes his beloved friends. This is not a story about people on an even keel, or Jesus on an even keel. This is a roller coaster.

Maybe a little like what we are going through. I've noticed that both our neighbours have been chopping a lot of firewood – maybe to work out cabin fever? We like having the children home ... and they will be with us for four weeks. We like being with each other, but then we are needing to negotiate each other's space again. And if we are alone, how long can we stand it? And we are worried about our family, and our elderly parents. And there hangs over us all, especially those who feel vulnerable, the dark cloud of coronavirus. What a time it is.

David Kessler in the Harvard Business Review suggests that what we are experiencing is grief, because we feel the world has changed. While we believe this is temporary, it doesn't necessarily feel like that, that from now on things will be different. We said it after the Christchurch earthquake and the mosque murders and now we say it again. The end of normalcy; the economic toll; the loss of connection. Kessler says we're also feeling anticipatory grief - that feeling we get about the future when we're uncertain. Usually it centres on death. There is a storm coming. There's something bad out there. With a virus, this kind of grief is so confusing. Our primitive mind knows something bad is happening, but we can't see it. The breaking of a sense of safety.

To our grief, Jesus brings compassion. To our weeping, Jesus brings his weeping. To our roller coaster emotions, Jesus brings understanding. To our reactivity and impatience, Jesus brings the sharing of our rawness. Unfailing companionship. And in Jesus, the presence of God, and with the presence of God, the assurance that we are held, firm and unfailing. Underneath are the everlasting arms.

But coronavirus brings something more, the threat of sickness and the possibility of death. Mark Achtmeier says that “death erases our most important relationships and sweeps away our proudest achievements in its grim tide of forgetfulness and nonbeing”. We can try to escape or deny that sense of futility and anonymity, but at times like this, it creeps back. It creeps back and can play tricks with us, unnerving us, disabling us.

In the midst of this messiness, Jesus says “I am the resurrection and the life.” Present tense. Amid anxiety and fear and grief and tenseness and even death itself, Jesus says that he is the power of life who cannot be closed off or shut down. His life in God and our life in Christ is irrepressible. His passion for life with us never ends. And when our fear creeps in, we can gently exclaim – Christ is the resurrection and the life. Not saving us from death, but saving us from the power of death and thereby the fear of death. In our union with Christ in God, our life in God can never be taken from us. God never lets us go.

Prayer for others by Sara Brown and the Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn from Church Hymnary 4 – Your hand O God has guided

Your hand, O God, has guided
your flock from age to age;
the wondrous tale is written,
full clear, on every page;
your people owned your goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness:
one Church, one Faith, one Lord.

Your heralds brought glad tidings
to greatest as to least;
they summoned all to hasten
and share the great King's feast;
and this was all their teaching,
in every deed and word,
to all alike proclaiming:
one Church, one Faith, one Lord.

Your mercy will not fail us,
nor leave your work undone;
with your right hand to help us,
the victory shall be won;
by mortals and by angels
your name shall be adored,
and this shall be our anthem:
one Church, one Faith, one Lord.

Blessing

We will meet again next Sunday or whenever you next access our YouTube channel or website.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa, te atawhai o tō tātou Ariki a Ihu Karaiti me te aroha o te Atua, me te whiwhingatahitanga, ki te wairua tapu. Ake, ake, ake. Amine