

Worship Service Bulletin March 22, 2020

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP *Veni Sancte Spiritu*

GATHERING

GATHERING SONG *Faithful One*

*Faithful One so unchanging,
ageless One,
you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on You,*

*I call out to You
again and again,
I call out to You
again and again.*

*You are my Rock
in times of trouble.
You lift me up
when I fall down.*

*All through the storm
your love is the anchor,
my hope is in You alone.
(repeat all)*

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God, who forgives all our sin and whose mercy endures forever. **Amen.**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of + Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. **Amen.**

KYRIE

Response: "Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy."

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

KIDS TIME

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH—SPOKEN

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

God of life, bind your faithful people into one body. Enliven the church with your Spirit and bless the work of those who work for its renewal. Accomplish your work of salvation in us and through us, for the sake of the world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of life, you love the world you have made and you grieve when creation suffers. Restore polluted lands and waterways. Heal areas of the world ravaged by storms, floods, wildfires, droughts, or other natural disasters. Bring all things to new life. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of life, show redemption to all who watch and wait with eager expectation: those longing for wars to cease, those waiting for immigration paperwork to finalize, those seeking election, and those in dire need of humanitarian relief. Come quickly with your hope. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of life, you weep with those who grieve. Unbind all who are held captive by anxiety, despair, or pain. Fill us with compassion and empathy for those who struggle, and keep us faithful in prayer. Hear now the prayers of our hearts...Lord, in

your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of life, we give thanks for moments of reassurance and hope. Help us to continue to live in gratitude for all of your blessings. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

SCRIPTURE **John 11:1-45**

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus,* ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’ ⁴But 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.’ ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus* was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ ⁸The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’ ⁹Jesus 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. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ ¹¹After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ ¹²The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’ ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin,* said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus* had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles* away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have

died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ ²³Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ ²⁴Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ ²⁵Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.* Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ²⁷She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,* the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’

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.’ ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The 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. ³²When 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.’ ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ ³⁷But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus 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 for four days.’ ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I 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.’ ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ ⁴⁴The 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.’

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

SERMON

My internship supervisor enjoyed throwing out one-liners. When things were not going well he would draw on his years of reading the King James Bible say that the situation

was like Lazarus in the tomb-it stinketh! Today we use a translation that sounds less offensive: Martha says, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days," but in the King James, Martha says: "Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." Yes, like many things, we have lessened the impact of the things we dislike by softening our language. I get it. I do it, too.

But in this case, I think we might be well-served by being brutally honest about a few things. I would say that the situation we find ourselves in today stinketh. Yes, I am all about finding the positive aspects. Many good things are coming out of this forced separation. And it is important for our future life together that we take some time now to observe these guidelines of quarantine. But there are parts of this whole experience that stinketh. And it is ok to acknowledge those, as well.

What might this story of the raising of Lazarus have to say to us today? How might we acknowledge the stinkiness of our situation so that we can notice the beautiful aroma of hope?

The story of Lazarus is a rich, multi-layered story. It involves family dynamics and friendship, it involves grief and sadness, danger and fear, it brings in to question the role of Jesus in this world, it contains physical realities of death and spiritual truth that leads to life.

It is a story about death and resurrection. Exactly what we need on this day. As we finish up this season of Lent and begin the journey to Easter, let's take a minute and remember the words of Ash Wednesday, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." For some of us, these words have become more poignant as we have contemplated the spread of Covid-19 and realized that death is much closer to us than we like to admit. We may try to deny death and pretend that it won't happen to us, but in moments like these, we must be honest. The truth is that death follows life. We do not have one without the other. And death may be imminent, or it may be a long way down the road, but it comes to all of us.

Death came to Lazarus. And while there was sadness and grief, there was a little anger there as well...Both Mary and Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Lesson number 1: It is ok to be angry about

death and it is ok to question the situation that allowed it to happen. “Why, Lord? We wanted Divine intervention, we wanted longer lives, we wanted you to come to us when we told you what was going on, not when you thought it was OK to show up.”

Death came to Lazarus. But even with the presence of sadness, grief, and anger, there was hope and there was grace...In the face of the sisters' accusations, Jesus remained. In fact, not only did Jesus accept their anger, Jesus joined in their sadness and grief. And then Jesus responded. Lesson number 2: Our feelings and attitudes about death do not cause Jesus to leave us. Indeed, Jesus stands in solidarity with us.

Death came to Lazarus. And then Jesus came to Lazarus. And then life came to Lazarus. Lesson number 3. Jesus willingly walks into the stinky experience of death and brings sweet smelling life.

St. Paul writes that if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. This is a sacred movement from death to life. It is the final movement to complete unity with our Creator. It is the hope that we believe and confess as followers of Jesus. It is the assurance that death does not have the last word.

But sometimes civic government does...Some years ago, in South Carolina, the Greenville County Department of Social Services sent this letter to Philip Fleming: Your food stamps will be stopped effective March 1992, because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances.

What happens if you are dead and you don't even know it? I think, that perhaps, there are more of us in this situation than we realize. Even as the Lazarus story is about physical death, it speaks to an important truth about spiritual death. What if our souls have begun the process of decay long before our bodies wear out? What if we need to start noticing that our spiritual life stinketh?

Our lives are filled with death-dealers. Activities, words, actions, people, even places that cause the decay of our hearts-that cause our spirits to die and rot away.

And we might not even realize it's happening until we find ourselves in the tomb for four days wondering, "how did I get here?" and "why is everyone around me crying?"

Once we realize that we stink, we are faced with some choices. We can stay in the tomb and wait to see if things will get better on their own, or we can listen to the voice of Jesus who says, "Lazarus, come out!" Come back out into the light. Leave the stink of death behind you.

Like Philip Fleming of Greenville South Carolina, it is time to reapply because there is a change in our circumstances! Martha, in her faithful response to Jesus says, "I know that my brother will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." And Jesus replies, "I am the resurrection." In Jesus, our future hope becomes our present reality.

Even as we prepare to journey to the cross with Jesus in the next two weeks, and we journey in a new and somewhat weird way together, we do so in confidence knowing that death-physical OR spiritual-does not get to win the day!

As we remain sheltered-in-place, I invite you to remember how Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the Living Water, Healer of our every ill, is calling you out of the stench of death and surrounding you with the sweet smell of life.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH
For the Healing of the Nations

LORD'S PRAYER

SENDING

BLESSING May the Lord bless and keep you.
 May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you.
 May the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

SENDING SONG *ELW 333 Jesus Is A Rock in a Weary Land*

Refrain

Jesus is a rock in a weary land,
a weary land, a weary land;
my Jesus is a rock in a weary land,
a shelter in a time of storm.

1 No one can do like Jesus,
not a mumbling word he said;
he went walking down to Lazarus' grave,
and he raised him from the dead. *Refrain*

2 When Jesus was on earth,
the flesh was very weak;
he took a towel and girded himself
and he washed his disciples' feet. *Refrain*

Text: African American spiritual

DISMISSAL Be at peace, Christ is with you.