

Sunday 29th March 2020

Invite someone to worship with you at the same time (at their place) and at the conclusion of the time together call/txt them and pass the peace verbally. ***The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you***

Preparation: a candle and matches, a bible, and a jug of water and bowl

Intro worship is differently located, separation but united in Christ and the fellowship of the church.....we encourage you to take a seat. Today and for the next weeks we shall be offering worship at home, yet still connected to the church family. As always we encourage you to be safe and if you are struggling, don't hesitate to reach out to neighbours, friends or those of us in the church.

So let us join together in worship today

Acknowledgement of Land – meet in many places on the Kurna land, and other traditional lands where you are located today. We pay respect to first peoples culture, tradition and spirituality and we ask that we may tread this land gently

Symbols: light the candle. Pour the water reminding us of our baptism in Christ, and open the bible reminding us of the inspiration of God in scripture

Call to worship

We come together to worship longing for tenderness because this world can be hard.
We come longing for light because our lives are crowded with shadows.
We come desperately needing direction.

Fill us this morning O God with your peace: your spirit is our peace and our path.

God of refuge and strength, like the Psalmist we acknowledge your eternal loving kindness, holding us, guiding us, surrounding us in times of trials. As we gather in many places as your people, we pray that our worship will reflect the vibrancy of your divine love. May our praise and thanksgiving truly resound within our hearts and our homes, within these walls and beyond. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Song TIS 179 Praise with joy the world's creator

Praise with joy the world's Creator,
God of justice, love and peace,
source and end of human knowledge,
force of greatness without cease.
Celebrate the Maker's glory,
power to rescue and release.

Praise the Son who feeds the hungry,
frees the captive, finds the lost,
heals the sick, upsets religion,
fearless both of fate and cost.
Celebrate Christ's constant presence
Friend and Stranger, Guest and Host.

Praise the Spirit sent among us,
liberating truth from pride,
forging bonds where race or gender,

age or nation dare divide.
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure
foolishness none dare deride.

Praise the Maker, Son and Spirit,
one God in community,
calling Christians to embody
oneness and diversity.
Thus the world shall yet believe, when
shown Christ's vibrant unity.

prayers (begin with a personal time of quiet prayer)

We thank you, loving God, for the vulnerable yet wonderful gift of life, even in the midst of all that is going on in our human life. To be alive and to know it is an unspeakable honour. This life and this world is good. We thank you that from birth to growth and maturation, and into decline decay, our life is precious in your sight.

Readings

Exodus 37:1-10

37 The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath^[a] to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath^[b] in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath:^[c] Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath,^[d] and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

John 11:1-45

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus,^[a] "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 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." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus^[b] 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." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 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. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin,^[c] said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus^[d] had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles^[e] away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at

home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. ²⁶ 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?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, ²⁸ the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

song TiS 647 comfort Comfort

Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.

Though your tears be rivers running,
though your tears be an ocean full,
though you cry with the hurt of living:
comfort, comfort.
Every valley shall be lifted,
every mountain shall be low,
every rough place will be smoother:
comfort, comfort.

Though your eyes see only darkness,
though your eyes can see no light,
though your eyes see pain and sorrow:
comfort, comfort.
Every night will have its morning,
every pain will have an end,
every burden will be lightened:
comfort, comfort.

we continue the reading from John's gospel

²⁸ When Martha had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 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. 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." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But 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. 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." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 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." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 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."

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

19 years ago much of the western world looked on with horror as planes crashed into the WTC on the morning of Sept 11. buildings fell, people died. We watched hours of rescue attempts and workers clearing the twisted steel and rubble. These images of death, waste and hopelessness were of massive proportions.

One could not help but look from a distance, from the hill across the valley, so to speak of what appeared to be endless devastation. A city block turned to rubble and ash. Indeed, a modern day valley of dry bones.

A few years ago family visited Japan and the city of Hiroshima. 9/11 was minuscule compared to the destruction of Hiroshima. This past 6mths bushfires, local and interstate raged out of control for weeks scaring large portions of God's beautiful land.

Today – now a virus pandemic is sweeping the world causing death, sickness, shutdown, financial, travel and human contact restrictions.

Some 2500 years or more a prophet named Ezekiel had a vision, a valley of dry bone, a hopeless and desolate place, symbolising the fate of his beloved nations future. I wonder what Ezekiel thought.

Life out of death, life from death, life in death? Big questions. Oh how we long for resurrection in our personal and communal lives. Oh to have faith in something so out of our reach, outside our experience. If we cant grasp or believe in resurrection, then we long to at least attempt to turn the clock back.

But it doesn't happen and it cant happen.

One of the lasting memories of 9/11 for me is a picture of some fire fighters standing at the base of the WTC and they were looking up. The headline was 'Dead men Walking' as I looked at this newspaper article I experienced an eerie moment. Here were 10 men, alive, photographed and then, the report said, were within a few moment of this picture being taken, were dead. There was no resurrection for them, no resuscitation, no hope, no escape.

We who have experienced death long for life to return, we want death to happen to someone else, not in a vindictive way, but not to us, so we don't have to face it. But we have to face it. Death comes to each of us, death is final, death is death, ...yet death is not the end!!!!

75 years on from Hiroshima I am able to walk the streets and life appears normal, yet for an eternal scar. 19 years on from 9/11, I see picture of NY and ground Zero with bright lights shining into the night sky where once stood tall buildings.

I thought these lights are almost spiritual, in that they are not tangible, you cant touch them, but the light shines tall, taller than the buildings once were. The light stands tall also in another way. They shine tall in hope, hope rising from the ashes, life from dry bones. Jesus said to Mary, I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me, even if they die, yet will they live.

John's gospel says the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

The two stories today, Ezekiel and the dry bones and the death and rising of Lazarus speak of more than physical death and life. They speak of hope, hope that death is not the end. Our life, the Christian life is built on that hope which says in Christ there is new life, new possibilities, new starts, forgiveness for mistakes, healings for hurts, sight for blindness, food for hungry, liberty for captives, and life for the dead.

Ezekiel, can these bones live?, asks God. Can Lazarus really live, can wars cease, can virus spread cease? can drug abuse and suicide cease. Can asylum seekers be free in our land, can 1st and 2nd peoples live together in true reconciliation?. No is the logical answer, but yes is the God answer.

Can one be born again asks Nicodemus, can one see a new asks the blind man, can a woman regain social dignity asks the woman at the well. Can dead men rise to life asks Lazarus (if Lazarus could speak)? Yes, yes, yes, yes, by the spirit of God.

We are so deep into lent, the time to reflect on the events leading up to the death of Jesus, that we meet death face to face in Lazarus. Why the story of Lazarus? That God's work might be displayed, we are told.

Laz dies and out of that death experience, God's work and Jesus glory might be seen. Dare we ask, why Sept 11, why Bali, why Bush fires, why tsunamis, volcanos and earthquakes? Why Covid -19?

World events can shock us back into life, wake us from our slumber. Lent and the stories today invite us to look at ourselves and ask, where is the spirit of God moving in our lives? Into what areas are we called to prophesy? Dry bones! Hear the word of the Lord. I'll make breath enter you, live, rise up, wake up, all is not lost, for we have a God who lives and gives life, even in death.

In the words of Jesus to Laz, who also speak to our heart and our lives today –'come out, be loose, be free, live!'

For those who are bound, those who are oppressed, those who are lost and whose world is shattered, those who experience valley's of dry bones, - the good news is that this is not the final curtain, it is not the end. When things around you bring you down, Jesus speaks INTO our life and says, Come alive!. Come o four winds of the earth and breathe life into personal circumstances, communal circumstances, global circumstances when all may seem lost, change is too great, when foundations fall, it is God who sends the breath of life, and bones begin to rattle, hope rises and life blossoms.

Christian faith is built upon resurrection hope, both for the future and also more importantly, here and now, this life, our whole life. Recall the words of Jesus in John 10:10, I have come that you might have life and life in all its fullness. Fullness of life means now rather than later.

When we look at life, things of the world that bring pain and confusion, when we look at actions of evil or the power of nature, when we look at ourselves and to others, when thing seem to go against us, its easy do loose hope and become despondent. At times all we can see is valley's of dry bones.

But faith in God, in Jesus Christ, brings hope. Hope that all is not lost, we can live and rise again, we can replace the old with a new. The writer of lamentations says

17my soul is bereft of peace;

I have forgotten what happiness is;

18so I say, 'Gone is my glory,

and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.'

19The thought of my affliction and my homelessness

is wormwood and gall!

20My soul continually thinks of it

and is bowed down within me.

21But this I call to mind,

and therefore I have hope:

22The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,*

his mercies never come to an end;

23they are new every morning;

great is your faithfulness.

24'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,

'therefore I will hope in him.'

For the writer of Lamentations, and we who face difficult times in our lives, and even the dark side of Easter, can say with confidence, that though our world may seem to fall around us, we have a hope to which to cling, a hope that says all is not lost, and all is not the end, for we have faith in a living saviour and Lord, who has overcome death.

Prayer

There are many doorways to cynicism, Jesus, many reasons for despair, many causes for fear; but there is no excuse for giving them ultimate power; not if we really believe what we claim to believe.

Resurrection is real, Jesus; we have touched it, and seen it; our own lives bear witness to it, and it constantly reveals itself itself in our world.

And so, in spite of the fear that nags at us, in the face of the despair and cynicism that taunts us, in denial of all that would seek to steal life away, we offer you our love, our devotion, our lives, as an offering of resurrection faith and defiant praise. Amen.

news and notices: How we doing? Send in emails or phone call and we'll endeavour to include each week some news of the people; keep up with what we need to do to restrict the virus spread. Take time to contact each other and stay in touch.

Remind you that part of our worship involves our offerings and that now more than ever electronic giving is a better option. There is a link to the church's E Give program on the right hand side of the home page of the website (or email the office for our bank details for direct deposit.

for the offerings that are made we pray.....

Strengthen our commitment to grow together and generously share the resources we have with others here in our own community and in the wider world.

Give us strength and discipline, to nurture our relationships;
to care for every part of the creation;
to foster justice and be in solidarity with those in need;
to work to end all war, and violence, and discord;
and to respond joyfully when we are called,
freely giving ourselves in the way that Jesus calls us. Amen

And now O God we turn our prayer focus to our community and our world in this Virus time.

Great God, we know and remind us that
you are an ever-present help in times of trouble,
and that's why we're praying now.

We are troubled and we're worried things
are going to get more troubling.

This virus is spreading around the world:
so many are seriously ill or will be seriously ill,
so many health care systems are stretched or will be stretched.

Be with front line medical workers, give them courage to do their work
and keep them safe.

Be with public health officials as they make decisions for the common good, and politicians as they roll those
decisions out.

Help us to be kind to one another, because anxiety can make us snappy.

Help our communities to be resilient and expansive as we reach out to help all who are isolated and afraid.

In these times of shutdowns and slowdowns, when travel is restricted or banned, as routines are disrupted and we
spend less time together or more time together, help us zero in on what is essential.

Thank you that love is also contagious and stronger than any virus.

You will be with us, and we will be with each other in sickness and in health. Amen.

Song TiS 687 God gives us a future

God gives us a future,
daring us to go
into dreams and dangers
on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow
in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us,
for new life starts now.

We must leave behind us
sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning
is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit
must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight,
and the strength we lack.

Holy Spirit, teach us
how to read the signs,
how to meet the challenge
of our troubled times.
Love us into action,
stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life, and
find our future there.

Blessing

We choose not to give in to fear:
Even when we are threatened by violence and abuse,
By virus or tears we choose to believe in the power of love.

We choose not to be led by despair: Even when dreams fail and the world seems to grow colder and more broken,
we choose to believe in the power of hope.

We choose not to be blinded by cynicism: Even when joy and celebration feel naïve and frivolous, we choose to
believe in the power of faith.

We choose not to be over-awed by death: Even when grief shuts out all other voices, we choose to believe in the
power of life.
In every time, in each place, with all people, may your resurrection rise up within us, and lead us to new, creative,
healing choices.

The grace of our lord JC and the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit be ours today and always.

Amen

Make a coffee/tea and call someone/fb/email/txt