



Words of Gathering & Prayer:

God says ‘I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live!’ Will you believe?

Jesus says ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’ Will you live as if this were so?

Jesus called out ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ Jesus still calls us still today – ‘Come forth!’

Father God we thank you for your goodness and your grace. Although physically we may be scattered, in spirit we share in this act of worship together, as one – to praise you, to thank you and to listen for your voice speaking to us. We thank you for the love and support and the friendship of the people that we enjoy here.

Lord – You are truly the giver of light in the presence of darkness – You can turn the darkest of nights into the brightest of days. You are the one who leads us from lament into joy. Lord – We praise you and thank you for your work of redemption and transformation among us, as you declare to us afresh: “Behold I make all things new!” O Mighty God of creation and re-creation, speak words of new life into our lives this very day with all its difficulties and challenges. Fill us with your Spirit to transform us, and open our hearts to receive your living Word to us, that precious Word that never returns void.

In the name of Jesus our Lord and Saviour we pray, **Amen.**

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God, Come. *Singing the Faith 24, Brian Doerksen (b.1965)*

Denton Burn’s ‘Prayer for Today’:

"Loving God, grant us peace and serenity during these times of great concern and anxiety - so alien to all of us as individuals and as a nation. Give strength and direction to all who lead the nation from the front, and to all who work in hospitals and the care sector. And vision to see beyond the day Lord, to a brighter future ahead. In Jesus name, Amen". *Malcolm Athey, Denton Burn.*

Time around the prayer table: Lament and loss:

I sit by Denton Burn’s prayer table, which was made about 4 years by the woodworking dept. at HMP Frankland. They made a lovely job of it, in solid beech. And there have been many answered prayers pinned to it since it’s been here. At the moment for us though, it represents a lot of heart felt prayers of deep anguish. In the scriptures (and in our lives), there are always times of lament and loss. And over this past week I’ve had a really strong sense of people grieving and a great sense of loss – loss of just normal lives and normal face-to-face relationships in this present crisis. What (I wonder) are you particularly grieving or lamenting over at this present time? What’s on your heart at the moment? You might indeed be grieving the loss of a loved one, or it could be that you’re struggling with the loss of companionship and relationship, or places no longer visited that ordinarily are so familiar

(like the church here at Denton Burn). Or it might be the loss of income, as this current situation really bites. I was talking to a friend this week whose income from his business built up over 25 years, has dropped to zero almost overnight.

What kind of loss comes to mind for you today? Pause for a moment now to hold these thoughts before God.

We may be experiencing lament and loss together. But let us never be overwhelmed by it. Many years ago, the prophet Habakkuk said: *“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour!”* (Habakkuk: Ch 3 v17 & 18).

We’re not in the same situation as Habakkuk was, but we are in a period of wilderness in terms of relationships and connecting physically with those around us. You could say that St Paul was once sat in isolation too – he was in prison! And yet still he was able to declare in one of his letters to the outside world: “Rejoice, and again I say Rejoice! So, like both Habakkuk and Paul, let’s continue to rejoice in God our Saviour, in all the ways that we can at present.

Hymn (Singing the Faith 41):

Blessed Be Your Name, in the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow - Blessed be Your name
Blessed Be Your name - When I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness, blessed Be Your name

Every blessing You pour out, I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord - Still I will say:
Blessed be the name of the Lord, Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord, Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name, when the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be' - Blessed be Your name
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering - Blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord - Still I will say:
Blessed be the name of the Lord, Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord, Blessed be Your glorious name!

You give and take away, You give and take away
My heart will choose to say 'Lord, blessed be Your name'

Matt and Beth Redman, ©2002 ThankYou Music

Psalm 130 – We consider these words slowly and prayerfully – A song of ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

² Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.

³ If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.

⁶ I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

⁷ Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.

⁸ He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

How does it speak to us as we reflect on it together today?

Gospel Reading: John Ch 11 v17-44: *Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus & raises Lazarus from the dead.*

Message – “Taking on the big one” – Key points:

Last week Rev. Jona led us through the seven miracles or ‘signs’ that the gospel of John highlights in Jesus ministry, thinking about each in turn and what John is trying to teach us about the bigger truths that each of the seven signs represent.

Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from death is the final and undeniably most climactic of these seven signs, it being powerfully symbolic of what was to unfold with Jesus’ own death and resurrection and his ultimate victory over death. This victory was the big one – victory over death itself!

Perhaps more than any other of Jesus’ miracles, this is the one where Jesus’ **humanness** and **‘divineness’** are shown in such sharp focus **together**.

Jesus’ humanness – Jesus isn’t purely a God-driven wonder-working superhero, who’s nothing like us at all. We’re told that he was very fond of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. Jesus looks around at the scene unfolding around him – Mary weeping; all those who’d come to comfort the two sisters weeping. In the midst of this scene of anguish and sadness, Jesus was ‘deeply moved in spirit and was troubled’ and then (in the shortest verse in the whole bible) – we’re simply told: **“Jesus wept”**. He cried. He wasn’t floating loftily above this human tragedy in some divine cloud, disconnected from it. He was right in the *midst* of this situation, feeling the same anguish as those around him. And he was

deeply moved in spirit, and he wept - Lazarus had been his friend too. **“See how he loved him”** they all observed.

Perhaps particularly in the situation we all find ourselves in at the moment, we need to be reminded that Jesus is right there with us in the midst of our anguish and loss too. He’s not ‘somewhere else’ - He weeps right alongside us in the face of loss and lament. **See how he loves us too.**

Jesus’ divineness – This was to be the ‘sign’ of all signs to leave no one in any doubt about his divine nature and his supernatural, death defeating power. It needed to be **witnessed by many** (it was). There needed to be **no doubt** in the minds of the witnesses that Lazarus was **definitely dead and gone** (we’re told he was smelling because of the days that elapsed since his burial). Jesus said to those around him – “For your sake I am glad I wasn’t there [when Lazarus died], so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” This miracle (or sign) was going to be too crucial to be marred by any doubts!

God’s perfect timing isn’t always our preferred timing – We read that when Jesus had originally heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then (after this delay) he said to his disciples, “Let’s go back to Judea.” Why does he delay in responding? Maybe we’re sometimes too quick to look for instant responses from Jesus – We want to come before him, and present our requests, and expect a discernible answer or a response ‘while we wait’ as it were (if we’re honest). And yet it’s clear from many stories of Jesus that timing is everything. And God’s timing is sometimes not our timing, and we sometimes struggle with that.

The great turning point in the story - Jesus says essentially: This death, this despair, this grief and sense of hopelessness — I share it with you, I understand. **But none of this has the last word in my kingdom!** Jesus turns to Martha and says – “Your brother will rise again.” And then we have that great declaration of Jesus that we affirm at the start of most funeral services, when Jesus says to Martha:

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” (verse 25) *Jesus then turns to Martha and says: “Do you believe this?”*

Do you really believe this Martha? **Do we really believe this? Because this sign was given, and witnessed by so many, and this account written, to leave us in no doubt about who Jesus was.**

Jesus commands into the darkness of the tomb – **“Lazarus – Come out!”** What a moment. Everything hung on this. Lazarus emerges from the tomb, still covered in the strips of cloth he’d been buried in. With the miracle complete, there was one thing left to be done – Jesus says **“Take off the grave clothes and let him go!”** (or perhaps we could put it another way: **Set him free from the clothing of death**).

In what ways does Jesus (metaphorically) command us to come out of our tombs? (whatever they might be for each of us in life). Do we sometimes prefer the shadows perhaps? What represents the ‘clothes of the grave’ for us? - Things that aren’t life giving that we’ve somehow allowed ourselves to be clothed in. Jesus, the one who defeats the ‘big one’ - death itself, calls us out from whatever our tombs might be, and sets us free from our grave clothes too. Hallelujah! *Amen.*

Singing the Faith - 345 – And can it be?

1. And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

2. 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

3. He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee!

5 No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayers of intercession, written and led by Lynn Forrester:

We pray for our church family that helps us grow in faith. For all who lead worship; for all who bring your word to us in other ways and for all who minister to us. May we be helped to know and love God better. May we soon be able to meet together once more.

Loving Father, hear us and help restore us

We pray for those who weep today through different kinds of loss. For broken relationships where there seems to be no hope; for families destroyed by death, poverty, war, violence, or abuse; for those who feel let down by society and for those who feel let down by you – May all know your presence in those dark times. As they wait on you, comfort them, Lord, we pray. *Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope.*

We pray for all people separated from their families - the homeless; refugees; slum dwellers. Those who cannot maintain social separation. The lonely, and those feeling forgotten and unwanted. Those in self isolation or advised to shield themselves at home. We pray especially for those in care, both young and old, that they may stay safe. We give thanks for our own homes and ask your blessing upon our families and our friends. We ask you especially to bless all those forced apart by social distancing. We pray that they all may soon be restored to their loved ones. *Loving Father, hear us and help restore us*

We pray for all who weep today: for those who grieve and mourn for the loss of loved ones – husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, friends.

Loving Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope

We give thanks for your loving care. We ask your blessing on all those who have lost a loved one this year - who have departed this life and are at peace in your kingdom.

Loving Father, hear us and help restore us

We pray for those who are caring for people who are seriously ill, or at the end of their earthly lives: nurses, doctors, hospice workers, carers, chaplains, pastors, undertakers. Give them strength, hope, courage, empathy and love as they walk with those who weep.

Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope

We pray for all who are known to us who are ill, at home or in hospital
We remember families where family members are ill.
We ask your blessing on all families where there is overwhelming distress.

Loving Father, hear us and help restore us

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour, redeemer, and friend. **Amen.**

Final Hymn – Be thou my vision:

1. Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Be all else but naught to me, save that Thou art;
Be Thou my best thought in the day and the night;
Both waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
2. Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true Word;
Be thou ever with me and I with thee, Lord;
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with Thee.
3. Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might
Thou my soul's shelter, be thy my strong tower
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power
4. Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise;
Be thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
5. High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun
O grant me its joys after victory is won
Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be thou my vision, O ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century. Arrangement by Rev. Pete Brazier, Methodist minister in Dorset South & West Circuit. Used with permission.

Blessing: May the peace of the living God be with you, wherever you may be. May you cast all your cares upon Him because He cares for you, and may you know that Jesus who called Lazarus out from death into life - brings transformation to our lives in the here and now too. **Amen.**