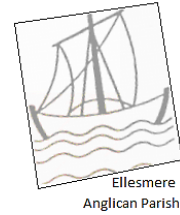


**Northwest Christchurch, Hororata and  
Ellesmere Parishes**

**Church@Home Service  
26 March 2023  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Lent**



*Today we have a mix of contemporary and traditional songs – in a couple of places I have included options for you to choose from or you can listen/sing along to all of them.*

This is the day that the Lord has made: **Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

**Our theme today is: A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH**

*We invite you to take a moment or two to be still and ask God to be present with you as you worship.*

**Opening Song**

**Everything that has breath**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9MftB8ecc4>

**Christ the Good Shepherd**

Christ is the good shepherd  
Who knows and cares for every one of the sheep  
In different folds.  
In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile;  
In Christ there is no discrimination  
Of gender, class or race.  
In Christ the poor are blessed,  
The simple receive truth hidden from the wise.

**Alleluia!**

**God of justice and compassion,  
You give us a work to do  
And a baptism of suffering and resurrection.  
From You comes power to give to others  
The care we have ourselves received  
So that we, and all who love Your world,  
May live in harmony and trust.**

## A time of confession

(incorporating Psalm 130)

<sup>3</sup> *If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?*  
<sup>4</sup> *But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.*

We come seeking forgiveness  
for all we have failed to be and do  
as members of Christ's body.

*A time of silence as we bring our sins and the sins of the world to the Lord.*

In God there is forgiveness.

**Loving and all-seeing God,  
forgive us where we have failed to support one another  
and to be what we claim to be.  
Forgive us where we have failed to serve you;  
and where our thoughts and actions have been  
contrary to yours we ask your pardon.**

<sup>5</sup> ***I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.***  
<sup>6</sup> ***I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.***

God forgives us; be at peace.

*Silence*

Let us rejoice and be glad,  
for Christ is resurrection,  
reconciliation for all the human race.

***I will put my hope in the LORD,  
for with the LORD is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.  
He himself has redeemed us  
from all our sins.***

*Psalm 130:3-4,5-6,7-8 (adapted)*

## Sentence and Prayer for the day

"I am the resurrection and the life", says the Lord; "whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

*John 11:25-26*

### **Prayer:**

God in Trinity, Creator, Saviour, Giver of life and truth, reveal the possibilities within us, that we may attain to the fullness of our humanity. Hear this prayer for Your love's sake. Amen

## Ministry of the Word

### **1<sup>st</sup> Reading      Ezekiel 37:1-14**

**37** The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2** He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. **3** He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

**4** Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! **5** This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath<sup>[a]</sup> enter you, and you will come to life. **6** I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

**7** So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. **8** I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

**9** Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"**10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

**11** Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' **12** Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13** Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **14** I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to **John 11:1-45**

**Praise and glory to God.**

**11** Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) **3** So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

<sup>4</sup> When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, <sup>7</sup> and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

<sup>8</sup> "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. <sup>10</sup> It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

<sup>11</sup> After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

<sup>12</sup> His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." <sup>13</sup> Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

<sup>14</sup> So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

<sup>16</sup> Then Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

<sup>17</sup> On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles<sup>[b]</sup> from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup> "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

<sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." <sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

<sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

### **Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead**

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

<sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

This is the Gospel of Christ.

**Praise to Christ, the Word.**

### **SERMON / REFLECTION for 26 February 2023**

#### **A Matter of Life and Death**

(An audio recording of this sermon may be available this week)

<https://www.northwestchchparish.org.nz/sound/>

*Lynne*

'A Matter of Life and Death'. We have all heard that saying, haven't we? What does that conjure up for us: perhaps saying to our teenager 'If we don't buy that sweatshirt, it's not a matter of life and death' – even though to them it is a total

tragedy! Or if we are unable to attend a function or event that we have set our minds on, someone says to us 'it's not a matter of life or death! Get over it!' Such a saying is a little bit of an oxymoron, because what we are actually saying is something is so important that if we do not do this it will mean that someone may die or suffer great harm if we do not act immediately. Neither of those two examples would lead to that! But how do you tell if something is literally a matter of life or death?

I remember a great story told by the late Rev Lynda Patterson, who was the funniest, kindest, and most spiritual person I ever met. It goes like this: She came across a court transcript from a legal case in Massachusetts USA in 1998. An attorney was cross-examining a pathologist to see if there were signs of life in a body. The attorney asks:

"When the patient was with you, did you check if he was breathing or not?"

The pathologist says, "No."

"Did you check the pulse?"

The pathologist says, "I did not."

The attorney then asks, "So how could you be sure that the patient was in fact dead?"

The pathologist replies, "because his brain was in a jar on my desk."

Then the lawyer asks, "but are you absolutely certain he couldn't have been alive?"

The transcript records a longish pause.

"If he was," the pathologist says, "he was probably practising law in Massachusetts!"

But let's return to our gospel reading. John tells the story of Jesus meeting the cold hard reality of death. Lazarus is his friend. He falls ill. He died. Jesus wept. Lazarus was raised from the dead. The story of Lazarus seems to be a preview of the resurrection of Jesus himself. The story has so many layers of meaning that the actual raising of Lazarus right at the end, seems rather like an anti-climax.

We already know that Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus are friends of Jesus from the other gospels, and in v2 we are reminded of this. But John is the only gospel writer that tells us the story of the death of Lazarus.

As the story unfolds, we see Mary and Martha sending word to Jesus "Lord, the one you love is sick." But in v4, Jesus assures the reader that 'this sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it.'

Jesus seems to be preparing the disciples for what is to come. For how could illness and death work for the greater glory of God? The text itself does not answer this question. The gospel invites us to journey into the face of death and grief, and see for ourselves whether God can be trusted to make a way out of an impossible situation.

There are times in life when things go from bad to worse in the blink of an eye; times when a bad situation becomes seemingly impossible. Many of us know these times.

The time when our doctor has given us the results of a biopsy that we have dreaded. Or perhaps when one of our children has turned their back on everything you raised them to believe. Or perhaps our 'impossible' takes the form of someone close to you dying, or your marriage falling apart. We are tempted in these times to ask 'Where is God in the midst of all this?'

Let us go back to our Gospel. We find Lazarus is very ill, the doctors are sent for, but there is nothing they can do. The sisters send word to Jesus "Lord, the one you love is sick." Things are falling apart but they have not lost hope. There is a chance for Lazarus. Jesus is their friend; he has healed the sick, surely Jesus can heal Lazarus and make him well again. So they send a message to Jesus.

But Jesus does not race to heal him. He delayed attending to him until he is dead; in fact he stays where he was for two days, then says to the disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.' This is a puzzle. Why does he delay journeying to Bethany to assist Lazarus? By the time he makes the decision to go to Lazarus it is too late. Why did he say in v4 'this illness will not lead to death.' It did. The situation did go from bad, to worse, then to impossible. Imagine the poor messenger going back to tell Mary and Martha that Jesus isn't coming today!

But if we continue, Jesus says that what is going to happen to Lazarus will be 'for God's glory, so that the Son of God will be glorified through it.' The purpose of this is that the glory of God is seen, a glory which is not only manifest in that transformative action itself, but also in the presence of Jesus himself. We see this reiterated in verse 40 when Jesus says to Martha, 'did I not tell you if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'

We like to think that the whole purpose of the story is the raising of Lazarus from death to life. But is it?

I am going backwards and forwards in the story a little but bear with me here. After Jesus had seemingly muddled around, he finally said to the disciples in v11, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.' The disciples misunderstand and think Lazarus is fallen into a natural sleep.

Then in v14 he tells them plainly. 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I wasn't there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' These are harsh words. 'Lazarus is dead, and I am glad.' But we must think of the true reason Jesus said these words – 'so that you may believe.' What, we might ask? There is an action, a reaction, and a realisation, almost if there are two steps forward and one back.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead four days; in Jewish belief the soul leaves the body after three days, the body would have been less than fragrant, so there was no doubt this time. Things had definitely gone from bad to worse. Martha goes out to meet Jesus, but Mary does not. Maybe she was disappointed in Jesus. Martha is more forthright. 'Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. I know that even now God would give you whatever you ask.' We hear the echoes of her hurt, grief and pain in these words.

Jesus says to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

Martha answers him. V24 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' She is a believer, she has faith, she knows all that Jesus has taught her, but does she know them in her heart?

Jesus goes on to say the words we know so well. 'I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' he asks her. She tells him v27 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.' Those are emphatic words of belief.

Martha goes to Mary and tells her Jesus wishes to see her...Jesus could simply have gone into the house but he doesn't, he is still outside the village. He asks Mary to come to him. Things have gone from bad to impossible, but Jesus does not abandon those he loves, but he does ask those he loves to come to him. We know that: in the midst of our 'impossible' times we can either turn to Jesus, or turn away from him. Mary falls at his feet and says exactly what Martha has said.

When Jesus saw how deeply moved and grieved she was, and how upset all those who had accompanied Mary, we read he was deeply troubled and moved in spirit. We come to that tiny verse 35: Jesus wept.

Many of the accompanying Jews said 'see how he loved him.' But others said 'could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' The issue here is not 'could he?' Because of course, he could. The issue is 'why didn't he?' We'll answer that in a moment.

Jesus tells them to take away the stone. Martha protests as she knows there will be an unpleasant odour. She doubts. She is stuck in her circumstances and her pain, and cannot see beyond them. We can be like that too; we cannot see past the needs of the moment and we lose sight of God fully present; we wonder where God has got to.

In v40 Jesus says to her 'did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?' He looks up and says 'Father I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of those standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.'

Jesus calls to Lazarus and Lazarus walks out of the tomb. Like the sheep and the shepherd, Lazarus hears Jesus' voice and comes to him.

In v 45 we are told 'therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.'

Our gospel truly is a matter of life and death. The purpose of this event is so that Jesus Christ is glorified as the Son of God. This leads to belief in him through the sign which the disciples, Mary and Martha, and others, witness. It is not carried out in secret. The raising of Lazarus to life is the sign that emphasises that Jesus is the resurrection and the life; through this we believe that death is not the end of our own lives. Through the event of raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus promises to all believers that 'even though we die, we live.'v25.



We know too that in raising Lazarus to life that Jesus is moving closer to his own death; through this event he has raised the fury and ire of his opponents, leading to the inexorable march towards the cross.

Sometimes horrible things happen in our lives that we question. When we have to walk through a very dark time in our lives it is when our belief and our faith are tested. But it is often an opportunity to believe and experience the depth of God's love for us. We have a choice: will we believe he is our Lord and our Saviour? Will we believe that he is God's chosen one who died for our sins? Will we see him as the 'life' he claims to be? Will we grasp the hope that he alone can give us? The choice is ours.

Let us pray: From the depths of our souls, we cry out to you, O God. Be with us in moments of fear and doubt, and steady us in death's presence. Bolster our hearts with your Spirit, that our trust may grow. You are our hope, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Response Song**

### **Breathe on me, Breath of God**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzxqtzju47I>

### OR **Spirit of the Living God**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uhbt5dgX4w>

### **The Affirmation of Faith** (or listen to: **This I believe (Hillsong)** –

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0mPk\\_3dXSg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0mPk_3dXSg) )

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,  
is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

## Prayers of the People

*The following prayers are adapted from [Auckland Diocese Prayers](#)*

**For the Church** – that we will know the Spirit's power in self-sacrifice and will continue to be strengthened with a servant heart.

*(Silence)* We pray. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

**For Aotearoa** – that the people of this and every land will know the Spirit's peace in their pursuit of justice, and work to take care of our shared environment.

*(Silence)* We pray. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

**For parishioners** – that we will know the Spirit's goodness in our prayer and works of charity.

*(Silence)* We pray. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

**For our dearly departed** – that they will know the Spirit's joy in eternal life and rest in the embrace of God.

*(Silence)* We pray. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

**For our local community of ...** (an opportunity to pray for your local parish and neighbourhood)

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### **Concluding Prayer**

God of the living, your Son raised Lazarus from death as a sign that he came to give us life in fullest measure. By your Holy Spirit, fill us with life. Renew our faith, hope, and love, so that we may live with you always, and come to share the glory of the resurrection. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer** [Audio - The Lord's Prayer \(Said\)](#)

Our Father in heaven  
Holy 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  
But deliver us from evil  
For the kingdom the pow'r and the glory  
Are yours now and forever. Amen

**Song:** **All to Jesus (hymn)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9THMpnv3YEk>

**Shepherd (contemporary)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tk0SAX2UGM>

### **Final Prayer**

Blessed be God who calls us together

**Praise to God who makes us one people.**

Blessed be God who has forgiven our sin.

**Praise to God who gives hope and freedom.**

Blessed be God whose Word is proclaimed.

**Praise to God who is revealed as love.**

Blessed be God who alone has called us

**Therefore we offer all that we are and all that we shall become.**

Accept, O God, our sacrifice of praise.

**Amen, Accept our thanks for all you have done.**

**Our hands were empty, and you filled them.**

### **Blessing**

In the light of the risen Christ. all is transformed.

May we look in upon ourselves, and out upon the world, and see all in a fresh light.

May we see people, and pray with the resurrection eyes of the Lord Jesus.

And the blessing of God Almighty – Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all ever more. **Amen.**

**Song            Great are You Lord** (*contemporary*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFWOGFShfb8>

**OR**

**Wonderful Grace** (*hymn*)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkI\\_oWr24wY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkI_oWr24wY)

**Dismissal** Go now to love and serve the Lord. Go in peace.

**Amen. We go in the name of Christ.**