



Service of the Word

29th March 2020

Gathering

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Open our lips, O Lord,

All: and our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

Faithful one, whose word is life:
come with saving power
to free our praise,
inspire our prayer
and shape our lives
for the kingdom of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Confession & Absolution

Christ the light of the world has come to dispel
the darkness of our hearts.
In his light let us examine ourselves and confess
our sins to God.

Silence may be kept.

Through the cross of Christ,
God have mercy on you,

Pardon you

And set you free.
Know that you are forgiven
And be at peace.
God strengthen you in all goodness
And keep you in life eternal.

All Amen.

Collect

Together we pray:

**God of hope,
In you we see a life that never dies.
Surrounded by death and violence may we
never give into despair.
But rest in you
Our resurrection life.
For you are alive and reign with the Father
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever.
Amen.**

The Word

Psalm – Psalm 130
John 11:38-43

Homily

I confess that there have been times in the past, particularly during Holy Week, when I have tried to imagine what it would be like to be in a tomb, like Lazarus. It's relatively easy to picture- after all, many ancient examples survive around Jerusalem to this day. It's likely he was lying in a low hole behind a rock wall, On a narrow stone ledge, in the dark, doing absolutely nothing. Confined.

In my younger days, I found the notion of confinement vaguely attractive - An escape from the tumult of young children as I juggled them, with the demands of work, messiness and sleep deprivation all rolled together. Solitary Confinement sounded rather like bliss-granted I could get leave when I wanted!

I haven't been finding the notion of confinement so attractive this week though, when the world as I know it, all my expectations for the near future, my little first world pleasures, my comfortable routines have been removed. I may not be forced to lie on a narrow stone ledge, but as I have mentally farewelled friends, family, and you, the community I had not even begun to get to know, I have felt, symbolically anyway, walled off, entombed...confined, and with no control over that invisible, detestable enemy -Covid 19, which has led me, led us, to this situation.



For me, the story of Lazarus and Jesus brings some comfort, reminding me that those whom Jesus loves- which is all of us- are not immune to all the uncomfortable realities and potentials of confinement like ours. That no matter how dark it is, and how isolated I may feel, God is always present. We are never really alone. The seemingly unredeemable is ultimately redeemable.

But it is what happens next in John's Gospel, after today's remarkable story, that gives me greater hope at this time. Not all of those witnessing Lazarus's miraculous escape from his confinement were deliriously ecstatic about it. They went to the authorities, and it was on this basis, that they decided ultimately to put Jesus to death. The immediate way to the cross and Jesus' own tomb of confinement started at Lazarus's one, there where Jesus was most impossibly, lovingly life-giving.

It seems incredibly ironic that while we are contemplating our own times of confinement, we will, in these last days of Lent and Holy Week, be following Jesus to his tomb. So we will endure the confinement of his Holy Saturday even as we endure the confinement of our own. But we endure that knowing already that Sunday will surely come, and that when we are walking in the garden of our grief, like Mary, we will meet him again.

Between the great dramas of life, there is almost always a time like this- a time of empty waiting — with nothing to do and no church services to help — a time when it is necessary to come up with your own words and see how they sound with no other sounds to cover them up. If you can find moments to rest in your confinement, when you metaphorically cannot see your hand in front of your face and none of your self-protective labours can be guaranteed to do you one bit of good, then you may come as close to Jesus as you will ever get — there in whatever space your confinement has led you to, may you recognise how the Maker of All Life has come to you, and holds us all in an indestructable love that no tomb, no virus, can ever permanently confine.

Prayers of Thanks and Intercession

Prayers and intercessions concluding with the Lord's Prayer.

As Christ teaches us we pray:

**All: 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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Closing prayer

A Prayer of Shelter and Shadow by Padraig O Tuama

We know that sometimes we are alone,
and sometimes we are in community.
Sometimes we are in shadow,
and sometimes we are surrounded by shelter.

Sometimes we feel like exiles -
in our land, in our languages and in our bodies.
And sometimes we feel surrounded by welcome.

As we seek to be human together,
may we share the things that do not fade:
generosity, truth-telling, silence, respect and love.

And may the power we share
be for the good of all.

We honor God, the source of this rich life.
And we honor each other, story-full and lovely.

Whether in our shadow or in our shelter,
may we live well
and fully
with each other.
Amen.

Blessing and sending out

May Christ

Enfold you with unconfined love,
fill you with unconfined peace
And lead you in unconfined hope.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you and yours
This day and all your days.
Amen.

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

All: Amen. We go in the name of Christ.

Resources used: A New Zealand Prayer Book // He Karakia
Mihinare o Aotearoa; Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community;
Church of England resources - [https://www.churchofengland.org/
prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/
common-material/new-patterns-worshp/sample-services/3-an-
evening-service-of-the-word](https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-worshp/sample-services/3-an-evening-service-of-the-word)