



29th March 2020 - Passiontide

WELCOME TO PRAYING SAFELY TOGETHER BUT SEPARATELY

More prayers and ideas can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>

HOW TO USE THESE PRAYERS

Please work through the prayers at your own pace. It may take you thirty minutes it may only take five. Find somewhere comfortable to sit. Maybe outside or by a window. You may like to light a candle.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO PASSIONTIDE

Passiontide begins on this 5th Sunday of Lent and begins the two-week countdown to Easter Day itself as we travel through the beginning of Holy Week with Palm Sunday, through to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. With all this in mind we turn our focus on the passion of Christ; his passionate and unending love for us and his world.

Today, we think and pray about life and death; our own, Jesus' friend Lazarus and Jesus' own death. We hear also from the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament reading - we hear how from the earliest times God seeks to bring new life to times of desolation and despair.

We acknowledge before God all that we want to leave behind in the tomb and all that we know God desires for us, as we, like Lazarus seek new life in Jesus.

We use the term passion because it comes from a Latin term used in the early church to mean to 'suffer or endure'. Christ suffered for us, today we read of his weeping over the death of his friend Lazarus, and we turn our hearts and minds to think about Jesus' suffering on the cross.

GATHERING BEFORE GOD

Make sure you are sitting comfortably.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

I am in the presence of the Living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of love, passionate and strong, tender and careful: watch over us and hold us all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

REFLECTION

Make sure you are sitting comfortably.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Ask God to speak to you through the passage that you are about to read.

BIBLE READING:

Ezekiel 37 v1-14 - The Valley of Dry Bones

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. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

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. 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. Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God:

Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.'

Read through the passage once.

Read it quietly out loud, so only you can hear it, but say each word out loud.

Try and take note of any words or phrases that strike you.

John 11 v1-45

The Death of Lazarus

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

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

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

have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. 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?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

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

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 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 for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. 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.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' 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.' Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

As you read, think about how the word or phrase you notice might speak to you today.

After you have read the passage again, sit in silence and try and come up with a sentence or two that sums up what you think the word or phrase means for you today.

Read the passage a third time and prayerfully think about what Christ has said to you in this process.

SOME THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

The first reading from the prophet Ezekiel comes at a time when the Hebrew people were in exile in Babylon; they thought God has abandoned them and they didn't know if they would ever get home. Ezekiel hears from God that this is not the end of the story; there will be a new time when the dry bones will have flesh upon them and new life will come. They will return to their home; God will be with them and has breathed life into them. It is a vivid story of home and reconciliation - the bones once scattered on the valley floor are remade as people; and the whole people will return to their homeland. God has brought life from dust. And the same themes are in the story from John's Gospel. Jesus' friend Lazarus has died - there is no mistake he has been in the tomb for four days. This is real unavoidable death, no metaphorical deep sleep. Jesus comes to the family, Mary and Martha greet him and in their grief are angry and upset. Maybe in our grief at this time for those who have already died, grief at what we are missing, grief at celebrations not held, family and friends not seen. We can offer this to God; knowing as Jesus responds to Mary and Martha so he responds to us. He weeps with us. He knows our fears, grief, pain and worry. Even though we are isolated we are not alone.

Maybe now is a time to pause and pray to know God's loving presence with us; even in our sadness and fear. God is with us. We are not alone.

Lord Jesus, let me know you are with me, comfort me in my loneliness, comfort me in my fear, for you are the prince of all peace. Amen.

But, Jesus doesn't just weep with us and stand with us in our troubles. He brings new life, new breath and new beginnings even when we cannot see them. Lazarus was raised, dry bones were brought to life. In this time of prayer are there things about your life that you long to have life breathed into? Maybe you seek the life of courage? The life of patience? The life of resilience? The life of inner peace? The life of friends to speak with?

Maybe we can hear Jesus say these words to us just as he said them to Martha: Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. 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?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Yes, Lord in my doubts, in my pain, in my grief and in my peace help me to know you are the Lord of life. Bring me that eternal life; and help me to bring your life to others. Amen.

PRAYERS

As brothers and sisters in God's family,
we ask our heavenly Father to listen to the needs of his children, as we pray.

Loving God, in whom we place our trust today,
we thank you for the ways you have always stood by us and watched over us,
even in the darkness of Lazarus's tomb.

Grant us the grace to know that you are the God of the living, and not of the dead,
and even dry bones can receive your breath of life.

So breathe your life into us we pray.

Lord in your Mercy:

Hear our Prayer

We pray for our church community and the life of your church in every place.

Grant to us all in the face of confusion and in the tears of our loss and pain
the confidence of Martha when she said, "Yes Lord I believe".

Grant to your disciples the gift of your compassion when you wept for Lazarus.

With you may we be a gift of blessing to our neighbours,
particularly the frightened and the frail.

Lord in your Mercy:

Hear our Prayer

We pray for our world with many beauties and wonder and yet a world often
troubled by strife and injustice.

We pray for the leaders of the nations, and for all who work to help and to save
the lives of the many, and for those who are working to bring the virus to an end.

We pray for your help and intervention today, that your world may be restored to
health and life.

We pray at this time that you will help us to remember and to pray for the many
places that are suffering conflict and injustice.

Lord in your Mercy:

Hear our Prayer

We pray for all those who are sick and are troubled and for those who care for
them, particularly those who are in hospital.

As you called forth Lazarus from the darkness of death into the light of your
presence speak the Word and bring forth your people into the light of your life
and healing.

Lord in your Mercy:

Hear our Prayer

Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life".

We remember and pray for all those who have died and gone before us,
particularly those who have died because of the virus, the young and the elderly.

We give you thanks for the difference they have made to our lives, and we place them and our trust in you the living God, to continue to keep them in your love and care until the day comes when we can rejoice with them in the feast of your Kingdom in the age to come .

Lord in your Mercy:

Hear our Prayer

A PRAYER CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

From the Church of England website

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there
and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.
Amen.

Taken from <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/devotions/act-of-spiritual-communion-339>

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day
our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass
against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is
the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.