



A faith for today...

— a moment together among the Wesley Chapel community
Sunday 29 March 2020

Leaders of all faiths from around the world this week, have been communicating their pastoral concern for us all. On Wednesday Pope Francis invited the church at large to join with him in the Lord's Prayer at noon that day. The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to the worldwide Anglican Communion saying, "We make no apology for saying 'Pray!' Even if you scarcely can imagine how, pray! Pray for yourself, for those you love, for friends and neighbours." The Dalai Lama this week wrote "Even more important than the warmth and affection we receive, is the warmth and affection we give..."

The President of the Methodist Church in New Zealand, the Rev Setaita Taumoepeau Veikune has also written: "As we begin this period, here in NZ a group of Church Leaders will meet Government members. This will be our opportunity to thank the Prime Minister and all members of parliament for the excellent provision they are making for working people, employees and mortgages. Also, for taking the decisive action they have taken so quickly.

While being in lockdown and isolation might be difficult, it could be that while we are locked down we have time to re-focus on what is important in our lives... to be still in the presence of God... an outpouring of the

love of God which is essential to sustain us. Even though we are overwhelmed by the situation we and the whole world finds itself in, we need to be reminded that it may also be a time for some positive changes. Changes that will enable the earth to breathe, to put children in touch with long forgotten values, for our society to slow down and to be re-born into a new form of co-existence where we take people into consideration and let them breathe again.

As we begin this period of uncertainty, may we be mindful of those who are in lockdown in overcrowded homes and accommodation, at risk of family violence and tensions within families and flats where people are not used to being confined together; and of the families that need to use foodbanks.

We will need to support one another in every way we can, especially those who are most vulnerable, through age or underlying conditions. We ask you to pray for the sick, those caring for them and for those in positions of responsibility with difficult decisions to make. Please pray for our country, our Prime Minister and government leaders and remember the entire human family in your prayers as we together face this global pandemic."

A prayer for today

in this time of uncertainty and distress,
keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.

You are the lamp that shines and the food that sustains.
You are the hope of tomorrow and the one who restores.
You are the love that forgives and the truth that endures.

Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;

that we may rejoice in your comfort,
and be blessed by the care of others;
knowing that nothing can separate us
from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Gospel Reading – 5th Sunday In Lent

John 11:1-45

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 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 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 upward 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. •

Remaining faithful...

What a year we have had over this past week and what a sometimes seemingly lonesome valley we are walking. We have had to adapt to entirely new ways of being in community with each other; we have been inundated with headlines; we have been transfixed by daily televised media conferences; and in these extraordinary circumstances, Church services and Mass throughout New Zealand have been cancelled.

But like the first disciples of Jesus and the early Church, we can continue to worship and continue to pray – even if for the time being the venue may be in our own home, room, apartment or villa. It's a timely reminder to us that God is not limited to a building or space.

But it's true: for the moment we do find ourselves in a valley – and the surrounding valley hills feel steep and almost insurmountable. Yet like the Psalmist, we too would still readily affirm "*But thou art with me...*".

So as we enter this next week, it's timely to be listening for a word of God to us. For God is in the midst of sickness and sorrow – and finding God's presence in the valley is sometimes a more faithful response, than merely expressing gratitude when we have a view from the mountaintop, when things seem to all be going the way we want.

In fact, it's the theme of this week's Gospel reading – an intimate story where the key figures are friends and family. But for them too, there's a sense of desperation, longing and loss. For in the face of Lazarus's illness and ultimately his death, there's disappointment at the delay that's occurred. Which means (as it does for us), the complexity of their emotions is real. Yet even so, amazingly they remain faithful.

That's the remarkable insight conveyed by this story: that disappointment and faith can coexist. For even in the midst of their dismay and despair, Martha and Mary continue to believe Jesus is the source of their hope.

As we journey into this next week, it's a timely reminder to us to remain faithful. That God's faithfulness, our faithfulness and our care for each other can restore life – even in the face of adversity. •

Hymn for Today....

Today's hymn is a much loved set of words written by Mary Bowley, that go from strength to strength in every line. It's a bright assurance of faith expressing a simple and yet absolute confidence in the love of God. *"For there is nothing"* as Paul says in his letter to the Church in Rome, *"in the world is it is or in the world as it shall be, that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"*. The hymn is most often sung to a Welsh tune, Ar Hyd Y Nos – also commonly used for the words of *"All through the night"*.

Through the love of God our Saviour,
All will be well;
Free and changeless is His favour,
All, all is well.
Precious is the blood that healed us,
Perfect is the grace that sealed us,
Strong the hand stretched forth to shield us,
All must be well.

Though we pass through trial and trouble,
All will be well.
Ours is such a full salvation,
All, all is well.
Happy still in God confiding;
Fruitful if in Christ abiding;
Steadfast through the Spirit's guiding:
All must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;
All will be well.
Faith can sing through days of sorrow,
All, all is well.
On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying;
Or in living or in dying;
All must be well.