

Service Transcript

21st March 2021

Service Leader: Ian Battiste

Speaker: Mark Reid

Prayer 1

Heavenly Father, It is our privilege and joy to praise you this morning. So Lord as we come together to sing, let us make a joyful noise to you. As we pray, may our words and our thoughts be a pleasing blessing to you and as we listen to your word may we trust in your unfailing promises for you are the stronghold in our life Lord, your word holds true, it is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword. Open the eyes of our hearts that we may see you more clearly today and every day. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Psalm 27:1

“In Psalm 27:1 it says this: For the Lord is my light and my salvation – Whom shall I fear?, The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”

The most important but sometimes most difficult thing to do in times of trouble is to lift our gaze from the fear and the unknown and to focus our eyes and attention on the Lord. The more we focus on the Lord, on His character, his hope and His promises, the more we can receive His peace and guidance. We can do this by immersing ourselves in the word of God that then anchors us to Gods hope and promises and Psalm 27 is a good example of this anchor and stronghold it is full of such peace and hope-giving words. God is inviting you to search and find your joy, shelter, light, peace and hope in him during these storms. May we always fix our eyes on the Lord and seek his light, hope and salvation during the storms in our lives – Amen

Response for call to Worship – Including into worship song

The Lord is my light, my hope and my salvation; whom shall, I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Oh LORD God of our salvation, we worship and adore you.

We sing your praises forever and ever. Amen!

Prayer 2

Heavenly Father You are the light that keeps us safe. You protect us, and we have no fears. LORD: open our eyes to see how wonderful you are and in times of trouble protect us we pray. Thank You for being our light, our hope and our salvation, thank you that you are our good shepherd and our strength in what sometimes seems like a dark world and though at times we might feel that things are against us, you have promised that You will not allow that to happen. Just as it says in Psalm 27 verse 1 “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall, I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” Like David Lord, we ask that you be our good shepherd and guide us to constantly seek after You so that we can flourish and enjoy our relationship with you every single day. - Amen

The Good Shepherd Video – a Spoken Word piece by Dai Woolridge

Video shared from the Bible Society and is a spoken word piece by Dai Woolridge entitled “The Good Shepherd”

Int. Prayers

It’s now been a year since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic and we still face its consequences daily. We also see the end of the tunnel in the distance as the vaccines are rolled out. Lets come before the Lord and pray this prayer together as we continue to trust Him through this difficult time for so many.

Father,

We pray for your love and compassion to abound
as we walk through this challenging season.

We ask for wisdom for those who bear the load
of making decisions with widespread consequences.

We pray for those who are suffering with sickness
and all who are caring for them.

We ask for protection for the elderly and vulnerable
to not succumb to the risks of the virus.

We pray for misinformation to be curbed
that fear may take no hold in hearts and minds.

As we exercise the good sense that you in your mercy provide,
may we also approach each day in faith and peace,
trusting in the truth of your goodness towards us.

We ask this in Jesus’ name.

Amen

Church of the Holy Spirit Ewlm

We are coming to the final week of the Lent Course and have received some good feedback from those attending. We’ve realised that our actions can make a difference both in our land and globally and we ask this prayer that God will show us how our contribution can make a difference to the lives of others.

Lord, show us how to do things well today,
So that others may not suffer,
Here and there,
Now and in the future.
Show us how to make our contribution
As we change the way we live,

Travel, make and consume,
Distribute and sell,
Use and reuse
Energy and products.

Show us how to do simple things well in our home,
Places of work and daily lives.
Show us how to protect the world you made,
In all it's diversity and goodness,
From our carbon emissions –
Global warming and climate change,
Rising temperatures and sea levels,
The displacement of peoples, environmental poverty,
Harm and destruction.

Show us how and show us why,
So that alone and with others
Our contribution will make a difference.
Amen.

Robin Morrison

Finally we pray for our fellowship as we come up to another Easter under Lockdown. Please take a few moments to pray while the music quietly plays that as men and women are again presented with the hope that Jesus brings that the Holy Spirit will speak into their lives. Pray too for those individuals you know of who need the Lord's presence at this time.

Quiet

Father we lift our prayers before you in the power of the Spirit and in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen,

If only you had been here

Have you had situations in your prayer life when you desperately asked God for something and that prayer seemed to go unanswered? You thought it was a perfectly reasonable thing to ask God for but nothing happened.

After Easter we are going to do a series with 24-7 Prayer leader Pete Greig on unanswered prayer when we will be examining why our prayers aren't or don't seem to be answered that I hope we will find helpful.

In this morning's reading this phrase comes up more than once "If only you had been here my brother would not have died." Jesus had been told of Lazarus' illness and did not get back to them until four days after the funeral.

So their desperate request was rather like one of our prayers when we pray and don't get the answer we want: Lord, if only you had answered my prayer, if only you had done something when I had asked, I wouldn't be in this mess now? Lord, why didn't you answer.

You say you love me, why didn't you answer? Lord he was such dedicated servant, he loved you so much, why did you let him die? We've all been there.

I will leave it to Pete Greig to help you explore those answers more fully after Easter but in this passage, we are given an insight into why Jesus didn't respond to the news that Lazarus was sick – because He didn't; intentionally. We know what Mary and Martha were expecting that Jesus would return to Bethany *post haste* and heal him as He had done so many times for others. After all, they had the privilege of being known as a family whom Jesus loved; surely Jesus would help Lazarus?

When the disciples realised that Jesus wasn't got to rush back to Bethany, they were heartened by His reassurances, because of the threat to Jesus' life by the Jews in Jerusalem. They didn't want to go back so they were happy with Jesus' words: *'This illness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.'* As we read, Jesus' definition of death was different to theirs, so much so, that when Jesus did tell them about Lazarus' death, he had to spell it out. When He said that Lazarus was asleep, He didn't mean a good night's kip!

Jesus arrived when everything seemed hopeless. In the Bible the third day was often the day when God acted and there are well-known examples of that (e.g. the rising of Jesus Himself from the dead). The fourth day was the day of hopelessness nothing was expected to change. Lazarus was dead and gone. All would have known that Jesus had raised others from the dead, but they were people who had only been dead a day or two at most. Lazarus was good and dead and as we find in verse 39 Martha expected him to be a decomposing corpse.

So we have a whole load of baffled people. Why didn't Jesus heal his beloved friend Lazarus? He had healed so many others of the most awful diseases. How confusing! There was no expectation that Jesus would perform a spectacular resurrection miracle. They thought that Lazarus was too far gone for Jesus to do anything.

So let's have a look at the responses of four groups of people to Jesus' actions on that day.

Martha

Martha was the first in with the *If only you had been here* statement. "If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask". It was respectful. I'm not sure she knew what Jesus was going to ask God for – it certainly wasn't Lazarus' resurrection! I wonder what we would have said to Jesus. Perhaps it would be something like "why on earth didn't you come when we told you he was ill – it's *Your* fault he died"? That's a statement I've often heard uttered. "Jesus I prayed, why didn't you answer? Why?"

Jesus gives her the answer straight - *'Your brother will rise again.'* And her response, even knowing Jesus had raised others previously? She didn't believe Him even though she believed in the resurrection on the last day. Yet if God can raise people dead for centuries in the end times, then surely four days isn't going to be much of a problem. It's a common problem today. We read in the Bible all the amazing things God did, Jesus did. We see

wonderful statements like “to God nothing is impossible,” yet our attitudes and actions are like Martha’s. God may be able to do everything wishes, but we can’t see He is going to anything for us – in fact there are a whole load of things we never bother to pray about. The Bible is full of promises to claim but they have little reality in our lives so there is no expectancy of God.

Jesus comes up with this wonderful statement that’s a favourite at funerals of Christians because of the promises it holds and the comfort and encouragement it brings as we face the reality of their death: *‘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.’* Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He has power over over life and death. He proved that in His own resurrection but the point he was making to Martha was that He had the power to do as He said right then. Even more significant is that for those who believe in and live by Jesus, they continue to live even though they die and will never die. Jesus promises those who follow Him life now and eternally. Our death is never our loss, only our gain.

At funerals we rarely read the last sentence in verse 26. Jesus makes the statement about who He is and the promises He makes and then says: *“Do You believe this?”* Martha said she did but I don’t find her reply convincing. Yes she accepts and gives this wonderful statement *‘I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’* It was a politician’s answer. She answers the question with a truth but despite being told that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, still doesn’t believe he brother is going to rise there and then as we can see from her reaction at the tomb.

Let me read Jesus’ words again. *‘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. Do you believe this?’* Do YOU believe it. If you’ve never trusted Jesus for yourself the know that Jesus came and died and rose again that you may have forgiveness from your sins and in accepting Him and following Him you have that assurance that whatever happens to you, you continue to live even though you die. It’s important and you can only have that hope and assurance of eternal life through accepting Jesus into your life.

Are you a Christian already? Then pray that God will give you that assurance that the promise he gives in John 11:25 and 26. I know so many Christians who fear death. Or who blame God for the death of their loved ones. Yet Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life – He has conquered death and is the bringer of life. Abundant life is not just promised eternally, but it starts now. Perhaps we can follow this up further by looking at Mary’s response.

Mary

We often think of Mary as the spiritual one who enjoyed sitting at Jesus’ feet hearing His teaching whilst Martha was the one with less substance fussing about domestic arrangements. This passage contrasts them differently. Martha was at least attempting to get her head around Lazarus’ death and Jesus’ non attendance. All Mary did was ask Jesus the same question *If only you had been here* etc. and then continue to weep. Lazarus’ death was a personal disaster for her and Jesus asked here to lead Him to the tomb. Here we read the shortest verse in the Bible *Jesus wept* (verse 35). Why did Jesus weep when

He knew He was about to do a miracle which would be radically transforming. He was a bringer of joy but sometimes there are those occasions where joy and grief seem to mix. This is the sort of situation where there are overwhelming emotions and Jesus shows his full humanity by feeling Mary's deep distress.

In Jesus we have a God who understands the deepness of our emotions and feels grief for our sin, our sense of hopelessness. As the crowd said how He loved Lazarus. How He loved Mary and Martha. He showed that in raising Lazarus from the dead. When God loves He acts; John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His Son. John 15:13 Greater love has no man than this that he lays down his life for his friends. Jesus loved this family from Bethany and He used His power to raise Lazarus.

This pointed forward to what was to happen only days hence Jesus Himself would die (and be raised to life) in order to bring life to all who would trust and follow Him because He loved us in our sin and hopelessness and laid down His life for us. He died for me and for you in order to bring us that life in Him that He promised to all who believe in Him.

The crowd

Of course the crowd watching started with the same criticism which was more obvious than Martha or Mary's: 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' there was unbelief. He did that for so and so why can't He do it for us? If God is so powerful, why doesn't He sort out the issue of war, why doesn't He stop coronavirus why doesn't He sort out the problems of the environment. All a products of human sin and rebellion. They are our problems; we brought them into being. God hasn't done nothing – He has already done it all in Christ. He has already come, died and risen. He really is the resurrection and the life. Our task as His people is to bring Good News – to give everyone the opportunity to show that there is another way God's way. We do that by proclaiming the Good News and by also living the good news and setting the standards of what it means to live according to divine values.. That's why we have been doing the creation care lent course. We need to show by word and deed that Jesus is alive and wants to know each person.

The Jewish leaders

By raising Lazarus to life Jesus sealed His own death. *46 Some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.*

'What are we accomplishing?' they asked. 'Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.'

I looked at this and thought, how stupid can you get. A man who's good and dead has been raised by the power of God and all they can think are politics and killing Jesus because He did God's will. Who did they think they were? Sadly that hasn't changed either. Someone

has said “Jesus great power for giving life only raises the anger and power of those who want to take life. “ Those that rejected Jesus who proved that He was the resurrection and the life, only showed that their ways were death as they plotted against His life.

It’s an astonishing truth but many of us have come across so many people who when faced with the truth of God still prefer to live with the “fake news” and “alternative truths” of this generation. Sadly like the religious people of that age, satan can blind our eyes to the truth God brings us in His word. We need to die to ourselves and our prejudices world view preconceptions about what God can and should do and selfishness before we can truly live as God’s people. And once we start to clear out that clutter we may stop our “if only” prayers and see talking to God in a new way.

Let’s pray

Father, the raising of Lazarus brings us so many challenges. It challenges us to embrace the One who is the Resurrection and the Life more closely. By Your Spirit help us to stop listening to the world and to embrace all that you have promised us in Christ. Please give us that assurance of faith that our life is more than our years and that death has been conquered because of Jesus. As we come to this season of the year when we remember again the death and resurrection of Jesus may you encourage us and may we live and speak Good News to others.

We ask this in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Prayer 3

Heavenly Father thank You for meeting with us during our time of worship, thank you for delivering your word throughout the service. May each and every one of us felt your touch through the songs and the preaching, and may we each take to heart the Word that was delivered to us during this service. We pray that those seeking an answer received it, and that those who needed a special touch were granted that touch. Bless each and every one of us Lord; continue to be our hope, strength and our stronghold; shining your light upon us wherever we may go. Finally, Lord please keep us safe until we can gather together again. In your name we pray - Amen

Blessing

Go forth in peace, for you have followed the good road.

Go forth without fear, for God is your light, hope & stronghold.

Go forth into the world with confidence, trusting that Christ is always walking with you.

For Reflection and Discussion

Read John 11:1-48

1. What do we learn about how God works in relation to our prayers from verses 1-16?
2. In verses 17-27 we read of Martha's exchange with Jesus as He arrived in Bethany. What do you think she was expecting Jesus to do at that point (verse 22)?
3. Jesus speaks the well-known words in verses 25-26 followed by "Do you believe this?" The answer seems to suggest that she didn't really understand the importance of what Jesus said. What do you think she may have understood in what she replied to Jesus?
4. The discussions with Martha Mary and others at the tomb indicated that their expectancy of what God can do fell far short of what God was purposing here. How can we avoid falling into the trap of low expectancy in prayer?
5. The religious people tried to kill Jesus even more after He raised Lazarus from death. Try to think of examples in our experience and generation where Christians have acted in clear opposition to the word of God and the gospel. Think too of how our behaviour and prayer lives may be shaped by prejudices and misconceptions. How can we identify them and repent of them?