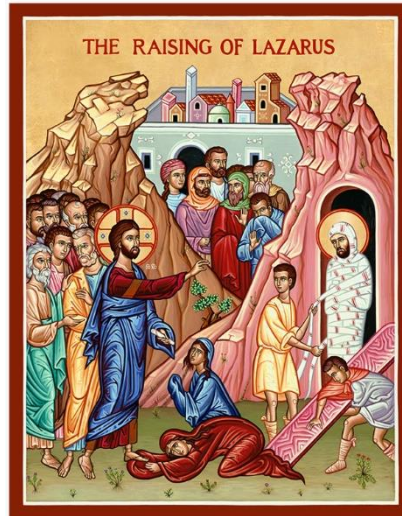


Worship at home September 5, 2021

Thanks to Judy Armstrong and Marilyn Shaw for providing music for this week



God calls us to worship:

Our help is in the name of the Lord.
Let us worship God.

We bring our praise and confessions:

Eternal God, first and last, our beginning and our end,
beside you there is nothing or no one greater.
You gave breath to all living things.
By your Spirit, you are among us still, breathing new life,
turning anger into reconciliation,
division into unity,
grief into consolation.
Through your grace, you open up new directions and new possibilities
for the world you love.
So, we offer you our lives and our labours in worship and in service,
joining in creation's song of praise and adoration:
Holy, holy, holy are you, O God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen.

Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart and mind and strength;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy

forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

In Christ, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. God has made peace with us through the Cross of Jesus Christ. In Christ, all things hold together. Accept the peace of Christ and make peace with one another in his name.¹

**In response to the gospel,
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources:**

Please remember to prayerfully make your offerings to the congregation of which you are most associated. If you're a member/adherent of Knox-Moore or St. Andrew's, Mooretown, please send your offering to Howard McKellar or Judy Armstrong.

Hymn: #346 "Jesus the Christ said, I am the bread"

God speaks to us through his Word:

¹ Ibid.

The Resurrection and the Life

God of wisdom, you have taught us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from you. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word, speaking through the scriptures. Strengthen us to live that Word as our daily bread. Amen.

READ JOHN 11:1-44

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.

1. In other words, with full knowledge and with full intention, the Good Shepherd refused to immediately come to the aid of his sheep. In that delay, he allowed the severity of the illness to increase. The unspoken answer to the question posed in verse 37: “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” is, yes. He could have. He could have rushed to Lazarus’ side and healed him. He’d done it before to so many other people. Or, like with the centurion’s servant, he didn’t even need to go, he could have healed Lazarus from a distance. But he didn’t. He allowed his beloved sheep – Lazarus and his sisters – to face these last traumatic days without him. Without their Shepherd. Without their friend.

That probably strikes you as an extremely unpastoral decision by the Good shepherd!

When his sheep needed him the most, he chose to stay away.

It is true that in order to go to Bethany, he would have to go through an area in which he was far from welcome. By going to Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, Jesus would be putting his own and his disciples’ lives at risk. Thomas gave voice to this risk. When Jesus finally did decide to go, Thomas exclaimed: “Well, if he’s willing to be stoned to death, let us also go that we may die with him!”

There was a significant risk in him going, but that's not what held him back. He intentionally waited for Lazarus' condition to worsen. He went so far as to say:

*Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am **glad** that I was not there, **so that you may believe.***

2. Belief is important.

What we believe to be true and right and of value informs how we respond to the myriad of stimuli to which we're exposed every day. This impacts our thought patterns, the things we say and the way we say them, our body language, and our behaviour. In short,

what we believe affects how we live, how we experience life, and how others experience life in relation to us.

For example:

Suppose you believe that politicians and governments have in mind the best interests of the citizens. They're not perfect. They make mistakes. But you believe that, by and large, society is better off because of the presence and work of governments.

Now suppose that government imposes a new law which requires every citizen wear a mask when they're not in their house and maintain a prescribed distance from other people.

If you believe that governments strive to serve the well-being of the citizens, you will probably receive the news of the law calmly, consider it carefully, conclude it *will* aid the health of society as a whole – with the knowledge available at the moments, and wear the mask.

If, however, you believe that governments strive to control the lives of the citizens for their own gain, that they're crooked, that they're conspiring with some other organization, then there's a pretty good chance you will receive the law with suspicion, feel threatened, conclude it's a conspiracy, and not wear the mask.

The relationship of belief to our style and quality of life, to the decisions we make, to the ways in which we respond to emotions and external stimuli is so fundamental that it is the primary reason John wrote his gospel:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through **believing** you may have **life** in his name.²*

We've already talked about the life God wants for us:

*What has come into being in him was **life**, and the life was the **light** of all people.³*

*I came that they may have **life** and have it **abundantly**.⁴*

*I speak these things in the world so that they may have my **joy** made complete in themselves.⁵*

3. In his decision to delay, Jesus illuminated in a very dramatic and profound way the essence of who he is, of why he came, and of why he is Good News.

Jesus came to reveal for us the Father in fellowship with whom is life that is nothing less than Christ's joy made complete in ourselves – joy that transcends our mortal circumstances and capacity for imagining.

*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.*

This is not to say that God caused Lazarus' illness and eventual death. Rather, what Jesus was saying is that in the midst of this very traumatic event, the truth of God would be revealed.

² John 20:30, 31

³ John 1

⁴ John 10:10

⁵ John 17:13

God is not the god of death; but rather the God of Life.

Jesus is not the way, the truth, and the death;
but the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

He is not darkness, but light.

He is not hunger, but that which satisfies all our longings.

He is not thirst, but that which quenches.

He is not despair, but he is joy.

He is not death, but resurrection and life.

The illness and the eventual death serve as an opportunity for Jesus to reveal the truth that God is not impotent, nor is He malevolent, nor is He bound by the constraints of our temporal existence nor limited imaginations. God is real; God is alive; God is able; God is good; and God desires eternal life defined by joy for all the citizens in His realm.

This is what we proclaim at every single funeral service.

It is what we proclaim whenever we gather on the first day of the week – Sunday is the Day of Resurrection!

No matter what are the circumstances in which we find ourselves, the life we enjoy in harmonious fellowship with our Creator stretches beyond the confines of our temporary mortal experience.

In Christ, even our death is merely a semi-colon in our story.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. What the Father did for Jesus on Easter, what Jesus demonstrated with Lazarus, is what awaits everyone who believes in him. It's what awaits creation itself when Christ returns and heaven and earth are forever 4.

*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?"*

4. If we can bring ourselves to believe that the God who is revealed in Scripture – the I AM of creation and exodus, of covenant and restoration – is real, alive, and good; and if we can bring ourselves to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is not simply a teacher, a prophet, a philosopher, or a revolutionary – that he is the Son of God, that he *was* resurrected and *is* the source of resurrection, then there is not much that can cause us to despair for very long!

Does that mean that if you're in the darkness right now you must not be a believer?

I don't think so.

Belief doesn't excuse us from the trauma and the drama.

It didn't excuse Israel from homelessness and slavery, nor Jeremiah from depression, nor Ezekiel from burn-out, nor David from catastrophically bad decisions, nor the early church from persecution. In John 17, Jesus prayed that the Father not take us out of this world, but rather that He protect us from the evil one.

Believing that Jesus is the Light, Bread, Water, Way, Shepherd, Door, Lamb, and ultimately Resurrection does assure us that what we're dealing with right now is momentary. It's one sentence, or maybe a paragraph, or maybe a chapter in a much longer story. A story that began with creation and will come to rest with resurrection and new creation.

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!"⁶

Do you believe this?

Amen.

⁶ John 11:40-43

Hymn #674 “In the bulb there is a flower”

We respond with prayer, faith, and service:

O God in whom we live and move and have our being:
We come to you in prayer as the summer season draws nearer to its close:
We give you thanks for the occasions we have enjoyed
to catch up with family and friends;
to travel for recreation and restoration and let our worries go.
We are grateful for each moment to savour the beauty of creation.
Refresh us for the season ahead we pray,
and renew our commitment to serve you.

O God, Jesus faced many demands wherever he went,
and pressure from critics, whatever he did.
We pray for all those who have not found rest this summer:
for those whose work is stressful, exhausting, or unappreciated;
for those whose livelihoods remain uncertain,
because of the pandemic or through disasters caused by heat, fire, or storm.
We pray for those which hard choices to make,
about work or school or what comes next,
about relationships and priorities,
or about social policy and community leadership.
(Hold silence for 20 seconds)

May they know your strength and guidance day by day.

Today we remember those for whom this summer has been filled with suffering:
We pray for those who have lost loved ones,
and those facing an uncertain future or a difficult diagnosis.
We pray for those who have lost their homes, for whatever reason,
and for those who despair about the climate crisis
and what can be done to repair the suffering earth.
(Hold silence for 20 seconds)

We pray for all those who join efforts to relieve suffering of any kind.
May each one find courage to face tomorrow in your company.

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way.
As we prepare to leave this service, walk with us,
and show us how to live each day as those who follow Jesus,
for we dare to pray the words he taught us, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with His blessing:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.