

Worship for 29th March 2020

Call to worship

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,”
In our fear and our faith
Lord, we wait for you
In the company of our community and the isolation
of of homes
Lord, we wait for you
and in your steadfast love we hope

**Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!**

**Praise him for his grace and favour
to his people in distress;
praise him, still the same for ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.**

**Father-like, he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.**

**Angels in the height, adore him;
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!**

*Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)
Methodist Church. Singing the Faith. Hymns Ancient
& Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.*

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Prayers of Praise and Confession
God of our waiting and our fulfilment,
we praise and adore you
Your presence fills our lives, our world and our uni-
verse
Your creativity dances in all that is
You hold each one of us in your steadfast love.
Your Spirit binds us into community with you and
each other
Your breath breathes through all that is.
God present with us and yet beyond our understand-
ing,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
we praise and adore you now and forever.
Amen

Let us remember before God those times when we
have not lived in God's abundant, loving way

Silence

Loving God, take all that we have been and redeem
and transform it, and use it for your good we pray.
Take the dry bones of our guilt and our sorrow and
heal them. Breathe new life into us that we may be
renewed to walk in your way.
Amen

These are words we can trust
Our sins are forgiven
Thanks be to God

**Only by grace can we enter,
only by grace can we stand;
not by our human endeavour,
but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us,
you call us to come.
Into your presence you draw us,
and now by your grace we come,
now by your grace we come.**

**Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
who would stand?
Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.
Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
who would stand?
Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.
Only by grace can we enter ...**

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John 11: 1-45

Meditation: Sitting in Grave Yards

'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

Martha's words echo around this reading. For me they echo from the very beginning, in Jesus's extraordinary decision not to go to see his ill friend.

They echo with the accusation that he didn't even make it to the funeral. They scream with the grief of a sister not only grieving the loss of a brother but also feeling betrayed and abandoned by a friend in her hour of need.

'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

Why were you not here? The smell of your betrayal fills our nostrills. Why are you here now?

Do you want to fill us with the smell of decay just so you can now mourn 4 days late? Do you want us to go back with you to that first day of grief?

'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

Through the accusations and the grief Jesus insists, the conversation draws the sisters and those with them closer and closer to the tomb until they can avoid it no longer they must face the reality of the death and wonder about Jesus' absence. Their grief

at his betrayal gradually transforms into a trust in God. Their cries of lament become longing clutches at what might be

'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

and then go even further

'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

The shattered bones of their faith are reassembled bone to bone sinew to sinew but as yet it has no breath, no life. That has been squeezed out of them by the gruelling days of nursing the dying, the shock of death, the longing for Jesus' presence. And so even after those declarations still their lament rends the air

'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

We share their reluctance to go into the places of death, to stay with grief or fear. We panic buy or look for ways to amuse ourselves. We try to distract ourselves from the reality.

Yet time and time again in our scriptures life comes in the places of death: in Ezekiel a battlefield graveyard becomes a valley full of dancing men restored to life, in the Gospels a man living chained in a graveyard is freed from his chains and restored to health, a young girl is raised from her deathbed and given food and Jesus is raised. Resurrection only comes in the reality of death.

'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

Jesus faces the place of death and weeps. He stands in the reality of all that is, feels the grief, knows the reality of the death, it's pain and loss.

And having grieved he has the stone rolled away and he prayed aloud so the deaf could hear and the flickers of faith could be brought to full flame.

And Lazarus stumbles forward, like the bones in Ezekiel's valley, resurrection comes in stages not all in a lump. He's still bound by death and needs the help of others to rejoin the living and live in abundant life once more.

In our lives now, in this time of fear and restriction Jesus calls us to sit with the reality and weep for it. To not be tempted to distract ourselves from it. To own our shouts of rage and our wondering where God is.

But Jesus also calls us to hear his voice calling us to come out into the places of God's life, to trust in

God's presence and to allow others to help us unbind ourselves through God's power and set us free.

Prayers of Intercession

**Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.**

**Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.**

**Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!**

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Methodist Church. Singing the Faith (Kindle Locations 13477-13499). Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.