

Service of Worship for 29th March 2020

Welcome to worship this morning. We join together in worship from our homes

Call to Worship

Gracious God, it is good to be together this morning. It is good to be together, with you and with each other. As we meet, may we sense your presence with us, your love surrounding us, and may all we do and say in this act of worship glorify your name. AMEN.

Hymn STF 11 / Hymns and Psalms 7 Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!

Prayer

Great and glorious God, Lord of all creation, we come before you this morning to worship you. We offer our praise and adoration in the hymns that we sing and the prayers we speak. Lord you are the source of all life, creator of everything, from the smallest creature on earth to the wondrous stars in the universe. We marvel at your greatness Lord, and give thanks for all the gifts you bestow upon us.

Great and glorious God as we think of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are worshipping you elsewhere this morning, we pray that we will be united in our hearts, and minds and souls; that we will be united with you as we respond to your call on us as your faithful servants. You are a great and awesome God and we glorify you.

Gracious God, we come before you as the imperfect people we are. We come with our doubts and our fears, our determination to do things our own way. We come with our stubbornness and our failure to listen. Forgive us Lord, when we fail to put you first, at the forefront of everything. Forgive us for those times that we let our doubts and fears overwhelm us instead of putting our trust in

you. Forgive us when we fail to listen to others, but more importantly, when we fail to listen to you. Merciful God, we know that you never reject or abandon us, forgive us we pray, and fill us with renewed hope. **Amen**

Lord's Prayer

Readings -

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Reflection

'I will put breath in you, and you will come to life.'

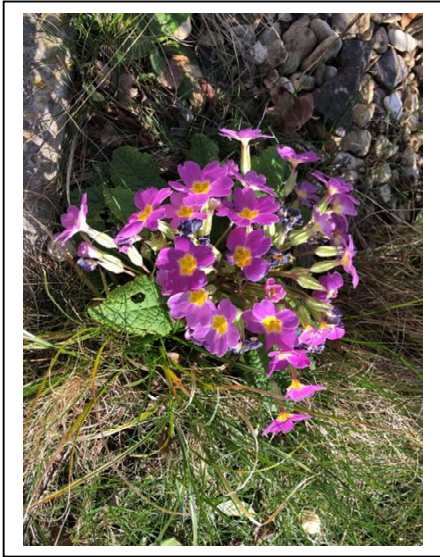
Ezekiel is addressing a nation which has lost heart and abandoned hope, but in the passage, we have an image of the creative powers of God as he breathes life into the dry bones and revitalises them.

You might like to reflect on the images below:

Can you think of parts of your life or faith at the moment that feel dry or crumbling and need the revitalising breath of God?

Where can you see new growth and new life? What gives you hope?





Hymn StF 391 / 777 Hymns and Psalms
O breath of life, come sweeping through us

Reading: John 11: 1-45

Hymn StF 372/ Hymns and Psalms 281 Come down O Love divine

Reflection

“Stay at home”. The message appeared on my mobile on Tuesday morning following the Prime Minister’s message to the nation on Monday evening. Whilst everyone will have received that message in some form, asking us to go out only for essential journeys to buy food/medicines or to go to work if that cannot be done from home, I’m aware that some reading this will have received a message to say that you must stay at home for 12 weeks. “Stay at home” – three words that will have an impact on all of us and we pray for one another as we each navigate this new and constantly changing situation.

The words “Stay at home” jump out for me towards the start of this long reading from John’s Gospel. I have spent time thinking about whether it could be condensed, whether we could miss out verses, but its such a rich passage in

its entirety and to miss any is to miss much! You may be scouring your Bible now thinking “Ruth – the words “Stay at home” are not in this passage” ...and you are correct. They are not. But take a look again at verse 6. Lazarus is ill and Mary and Martha have sent a message to Jesus saying to let him know. Our logical conclusion would be that Jesus would immediately drop everything and rush to Bethany where Lazarus was. But he doesn't. In V6 of John 11 we read that Jesus stayed where he was for two more days and only then did he say to his disciples that they should set off. Why might Jesus have waited? Jesus had a great love for this family at Bethany so it wasn't that he couldn't be bothered. Our reading gives us some possibilities to ponder – Jesus knew that Lazarus would not die and Jesus draws attention to the fact that this whole situation should be glorifying to God. Jesus stays 'at home' – stays where he is.

But not for long. Jesus and the disciples travel to Bethany. Such travel is a dangerous business and Jesus' presence in Bethany draws attention to Jesus again and results in a plot to kill him (read John 12 for more on this!). Before he even reaches the house he sees Martha who comes to meet him on the road. We only catch a snippet of their conversation. Spend some time imagining it in more detail. What would you have said to Jesus if you were Martha? Mary too wants to talk to Jesus when he arrives. What would you have said to him if you were Mary?

The situation for Mary, Martha and Lazarus is about to change. Despite the four days in the tomb and the bad smell that Martha has warned him about, Jesus asks that the stone be taken from the tomb entrance. And far from 'Stay in' Jesus calls to Lazarus “Come out!” (verse 43). Lazarus still wrapped in graveclothes, emerges from the tomb.

And we will emerge also. It's my prayer that we will emerge from Covid-19 enriched in our faith. It's my prayer that we will emerge from Covid -19 with a deeper appreciation of the many blessings God has given to us. Its my prayer that we will emerge from Covid 19 not taking for granted things like a hug or a handshake. And it's my prayer that whilst we stay at home and when we emerge we will know that Jesus is with us. In the bewildering times, Jesus as he was with Martha and Mary, is with us. In the times of sadness and loneliness,

may we know that Jesus weeps with us. And at all times - staying in or going out - may we glorify God and hold these words of Jesus which he said to Martha, especially close: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11: 25).

Hymn Jesus shall take the highest honour (STF 356) or STF 357/Hymns and Psalms 264 Jesus the name high over all

Prayers

Lord, you are our maker, our redeemer, our comforter and we offer our thanks and praise to you. We give you thanks for the new life that you offer us in Christ. Thank you Lord, that you call us and guide us, ever compassionate, leading us and equipping us. Thank you Lord, that your Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for us, and that he rose again to reign over us. Lord, as we offer you the life of this day, give us grace to love and serve you, in the name of your Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Intercessions

Heavenly Father, we bring to you our prayers for the people of the world.

We pray for the Church throughout the world and for all church leaders. As we find new ways to worship as a dispersed community, we hold each other in prayer. We pray for the churches in our circuit, and we pray that although the doors are shut people will discover new ways of worshipping you. We pray for those churches that remain open to offer outreach ministries to the needy. For those helping the hungry and homeless. Lord, we ask that you will keep all those in attendance safe and well.

We pray for our country at a time of national emergency. We pray for our leaders, that political parties will work collaboratively to serve the nation. We ask that you give our country's leaders wisdom and discernment as they make difficult decisions which affect the nation.

We pray for all those who are key-workers, for those working in the National Health Service and other emergency services, and for those people continuing to work in order to keep our country running. We pray for businesses that are struggling to pay wages as they are forced to close, and we hold in our thoughts all those who are facing financial difficulties in a time of uncertainty.

Heavenly Father, we pray for those, maybe including ourselves, who are living alone and unable to go out, and we give thanks to those in our communities who are reaching out to them to make sure that they/we are safe. Make us alive Lord, to the needs of our community, fill us with compassion and help us to share in each other's worries and also in each other's joys.

We pray for those who are ill, particularly those in hospital and for their families. We give thanks for the doctors and nurses and other health staff who are caring for them, and ask that you will keep them safe in their work. We bring before you Lord, those who have lost loved ones and ask, that in their sorrow they will know your love, and in their despair, they will find hope.

And Lord, we pray for ourselves, that in these uncertain times our faith will never waiver and that each day we will grow closer to you.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 345/ Hymns and Psalms 216 And can it be

Grace (say these words to those who are sharing this worship & hear them
saying the words to you)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen