



Devotion for the 5th Sunday of Lent March 29th, 2020

for

Claremont United Church

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Goodwood United Church

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Minister: Rev. Lionel Ketola BA, M. Div.

Opening: Psalm 46: 1-2

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea ...

Kyrie (*We cry out for God's presence*)

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Prayer of the Day *From Liturgies for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare, p. 16*

God of compassion,
you call us out of the bindings of death
on this, our resurrection day:
make us ready to surrender
the fear in which we hide
to step into your future
alive and unashamed;
through Jesus Christ,
the life of the world. Amen.

Gospel Reading: John 11: 1-5, 17 – 28, 32 – 45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But 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." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." ²⁸When 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."

³²When 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."

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus 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." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I 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." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The 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."

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Reflection: "Like Lazarus"

This week, a member of our first-ever online "Zoom" Bible Study at Goodwood United Church wondered aloud whether Lazarus might have felt disappointed to be brought back from death. A fair question. Maybe he had already lived a full life, and was actually ready to make his next journey to God. Or maybe Martha and Mary desperately needed Lazarus for their survival - why else would they beg Jesus to travel to be with them - knowing that by doing so, Jesus would be putting his own personal safety at risk? (Opposition to Jesus' ministry was growing).

And having died already, did Lazarus have anything to lose? And what was different about him afterwards? Did he have a changed attitude towards death? Was he more open to the experience of life? Did he appreciate the struggles of others more? Was he more open to the 'big questions' of life? For the writer of John's Gospel, Lazarus becomes a 'sign' meant to point us to the new life that we can all discover in our relationship with God.

Suzanne Guthrie, a well-known writer and speaker, had her own experience of 'new life' in her twenties. A friend of hers described it in this way: "She's Lazarus come out of the tomb." Reflecting on that experience, years later, Suzanne offers these words:

"In a way it was true, the first of a series of conversions and awakenings, like a hermit crab molting, leaving behind an exoskeleton time after time and, in successive increments living for something unseen and beyond myself. Life in Christ demands successive deaths and re-births. Maturing and growing in consciousness requires painful re-engagements with life-cycles of re-birth, self-sacrifice, transformation, dying, and being born again. Am I due for another molting? A grace of aging is knowing from experience that the calling forth (*Lazarus, come out!*) will happen in its own time, and once you emerge from the latest tomb - whatever that may be - you can't go back anymore than you can change your mind about having a baby when you are in labor. I know I'm called, like Lazarus, to come out of my tomb, to become fully alive, again and again."

Question for personal Reflection: How is God calling me to new life?

Roll Away the Stone: A Prayer

by Suzanne Guthrie

Roll away the stone that is over my heart, O God! Long habits of capitulation and cowardice distance me from the compassion You planted in my soul when You first knit me together in my mother's womb. Awaken my slumbering heart! Help me to respond to others needs! Call me forth from the tomb of deadening acquiescence, my close-mindedness, my limitations, my stupor of sloth, my prejudices. Roll away the stone, so heavy, heavy over my heart, O Holy One. Amen.

A Prayer for Others

Breath of life,
We think of those who cry out to you today,
of those who long for the morning,
of those who are waiting for the long Lent to end.

We pray that our ears will be attentive to their cry,
that we will stand with them,
steadfast together in your love,
bringing life before death. Amen.

~ posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website.

A Lazarus Blessing

The secret of this blessing
is that it is written
on the back
of what binds you.

To read this blessing,
you must take hold
of the end
of what
confines you,
must begin to tug
at the edge of what wraps
you round.

It may take long
and long
for its length to fall away,
for the words
of this blessing
to unwind
in folds
about your feet.

By then
you will no longer
need them.

By then this blessing
will have pressed itself
into your waking flesh,
will have passed
into your bones,
will have traveled
every vein
until it comes to rest
inside the chambers
of your heart
that beats to
the rhythm
of benediction
and the cadence
of release.

—Jan Richardson, from [*Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*](#)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thank you Goodwood United Church members!

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our “**Virtual Soup Lunch**” that happened this past Thursday March 26, during which we made soup at home and made a donation to the Uxbridge Loaves and Fishes Food Bank!! This fundraiser ‘virtual Soup Lunch’ was Jackie’s idea and everyone quickly got on board and helped make it happen, so thank you everyone!

EARTH HOUR is this coming **Saturday March 28, from 8:30 pm – 9:30 pm.**

Although Claremont United Church’s on-location Earth Hour event has been cancelled due to COVID-19 and social distancing requirements, there is a strong interest in promoting it within the community as a “stay-at-home” event.

We are encouraging members of both churches to observe Earth Hour this coming Saturday night **in your homes.** Keep an eye out for the **Earth Hour prayer sheet** in your email inbox, for you to print off and use during that hour.

What is Earth Hour? It is a global “lights-out” event which started a number of years ago. Each year, on the last Saturday night of March, we turn out our house lights and unplug all of the things that we can unplug, and spend the hour in candle light (safely!) in order to reflect on our responsibility to care for the Earth during this time of environmental crisis.



Find us online! Check out our websites!

These weekly Sunday devotions will be posted on our church websites, so check them out!

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Find us on Facebook!

I have also been busy setting up a new Facebook page for Goodwood United Church, and I have now updated the Facebook page for Claremont United Church so it's current. I'll be posting updates on them regularly through this time, so please check them out.

Continued Support for our Congregations

During these weeks when our churches are not meeting for public worship, we ask you to please prayerfully consider how you are able to continue supporting our congregation with its continued financial obligations. Offerings can be mailed to the church address itself, or you can mail your offering to your church's treasurer. PAR forms are also available if you would like to use one for direct debit givings. Thank you for your continued support of our congregation's ministry.



**Thanks
for Your
Support!**