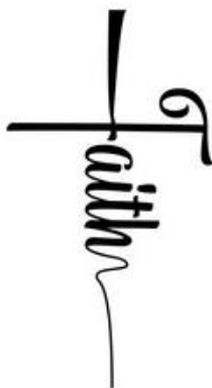


The 'Alternative' Smithy Bridge Methodist Newsletter #1 - 2020

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the ASBM Newsletter, reasonably priced at £0. Where faith meets irreverence and we all remain friends – take care and may your God be with you. Ed

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The doors may be closed, but
THE CHURCH IS OPEN! KEEP ALL
COMMUNICATION CHANNELS OPEN AND
WITH FAITH, WE WILL GET THROUGH THIS



Ed's message re Covid crazes

Remember – there is plenty of food for everyone. The potatoes have already been picked and are in cold storage. Toilet roll is not going to run out, unless the Andrex puppy returns with a few mates. But if it does run out, Izal are waiting to step in with their wipe clean reusables, so STOP PANIC BUYING!

Love Thy Neighbour was explained over 2000 years ago and still valid today, so think - for every item you take from the shop which you don't need, it is one less item for someone who DOES need it. At times like these we are seeing the best and the worst of human nature. Let's all have a go at the former and help your fellow man. Ed



Rev Helen's message

YouTube version with Helen's face and everything:

<https://youtu.be/Z1MitCkji1g>

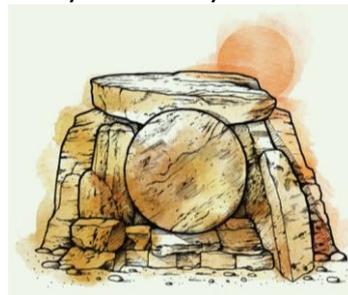
The titles of our two readings this week in my bible are Jesus Raises Lazarus to life and the valley of dry bones both are stories with metaphors of death to life.

In these times when folk are fearful and it does indeed feel like life as we know it is actually dead we can draw some comfort from both of these readings.

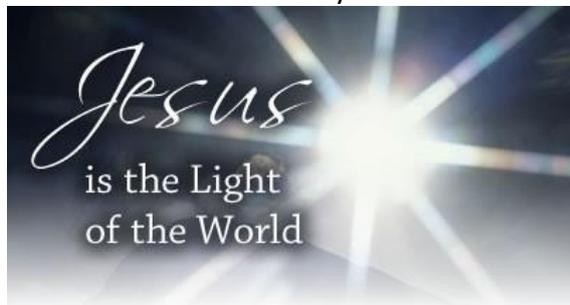
Part of me wanted to run away from the gory details of the Lazarus story and even that surreal picture of a valley of bones. This could depress us even more but do you know what?

It actually speaks hope into our current situation or that is what I have been reflecting on.

I want to concentrate on the final paragraph of the Lazarus story in particular the phrase "they took away the stone."



The stone was at the entrance to the tomb. I heard today large stones are being placed at the entrance to car parks to prevent people from entering and it does feel that as a society stones are being put across many entrances of the places we love to go as we are in lockdown. We must hold onto the fact that the stones eventually will be taken away and there will be opportunity for new life to come out of the tomb. There are many stories of fear/darkness, death/decay, but Jesus is a part of the story that promises new life and light from darkness just as the stone was rolled away.

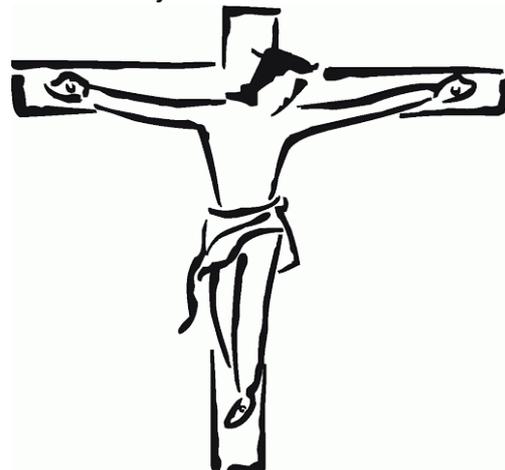


Stones can be stepping stones again the potential of new beginnings. Where are the stones in our community that can be stepping stones? There has certainly been much use of social media and on line church could these be stepping stones for those who have not heard God's call on their lives or indeed who have but have forgotten. We maybe need to speed some time identifying what these stones might be and where they might lead. It is certain that God will help us identify them as a way through this chaos and storm. There were in John's account many witnesses to the stone being rolled away. What a responsibility and challenge we as church are presented with, as we prepare for stones and barriers to be rolled away. Could the church in this wilderness experience be being prepared for such a time as this? I know the questions will be asked. "Where is God in this "One thing is certain we are the witnesses to God's grace, peace, strength and fortitude.



It seems to me that as the story of Lazarus unfolded Jesus was in conversation again this time with Martha who was grieving. How many conversations can we have with those who grieve or are isolated and fearful? This must be our priority to reassure as Jesus did when he reminded Martha of what faith is all about. Jesus says "Did I not tell you" Jesus has told us he will be with us always. We must stand on that promise and believe it with a passion.

Jesus cried out to God in prayer and to Lazarus to "come out" The church can be the vehicle that calls people to come out ...not step out on the streets as that would be madness but we can call people to step out of doom and gloom and fear to see beauty in the things they have may never found solace in before. We can cry out in prayer for the victims. We can cry out in gratitude for all those risking everything to do their jobs.



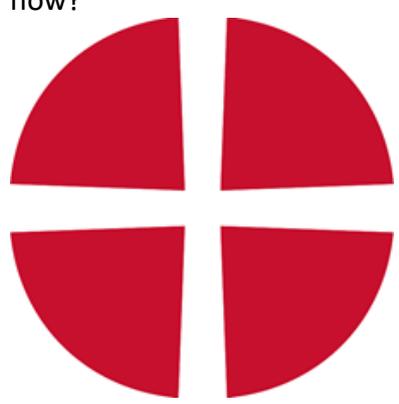
Jesus also said that Lazarus was to be unbound and let go. Is this reminding us that people will come out of this with changed lives that signal an end to loneliness, fear and past unfulfilled lives and pain?

May we cry out as the stones of the temple of Jerusalem for this to be reality. May we act upon the belief that this tragedy will lead to triumph and that God can use the opportunity to bring new life. There are already signs as communities begin to pull together. Our Old Testament reading from Ezekiel had us standing in a valley of dry bones. This is surreal and ethereal or otherworldly for this is where we are standing at the moment. In the words of the text we are given another promise "I will cause breath to enter you and you will live, ". These are prophetic words and it is no coincidence that these words are the chosen lectionary for this week.

Breathing Christ

This is the hope we all need, the opportunity to revive the church the whole house of Israel who will once again know and trust God and through all of this current crisis be re-awakened to new faith and life.

For reflection find a stone hold it and notice its weight, shape and texture and reflect on the thoughts in the above reflection. What is God saying to you right now?



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Planet Janet's thought for the day



Spending time tidying the garden I came across these reminders that there is hope. These plants do this "going to ground" "self-isolating" each year and then bounce right back as spring time comes. They burst into life again fresh and with a new lease of life. While they are away they are putting down roots, storing up strength and nourishment ready to do life again. A very clear reminder for us to use this down-time wisely and that there is hope.....

"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope".

Psalm 130:5 | NIV



29th March Service

Opening Prayer

As we come to worship you might like to have a time of silence and light a candle. Then pray: Holy and Loving God I come to worship you, as I do I remember that I am a part of your church in my community and in the world, and I take comfort from the fact that I am not alone.

Come by your Holy Spirit and help me to worship you in spirit and in truth.

Amen

Hymn: StF 370 Breathe on me breath of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5keJHZdWYM>

faith
— OVER —
fear

Let us pray together

Holy and Loving God, all life comes from you, and in you all things hold together. As we remember this, we pause to give you thanks and Praise.

As we remember this, we are reminded that you hold the end from the beginning, and that nothing is too large or too small for you.

As we remember this, remind us that as all things are held, so we are held by you, in love.

Help us in our anxious thoughts.

Help us in our day to day lives.

Help us in this time of deep uncertainty.

We acknowledge that at times we are selfish, at times we do not seek you first.

But we know that you are always faithful, merciful, gracious, and forgiving.

(pause)

We receive your mercy and forgiveness
faithfulness and grace.

In the name of Christ.

Amen

Reading from the Old Testament

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Gospel Reading:

John 11: 1-45

Time to Reflect

These readings are full of hope, reminding us that the resurrection is real, and new life is possible.

Take time to read the gospel passage slowly and prayerfully again.

Is there a word or a passage that stands out to you?

Pause to spend time with that word/ passage.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you?

If Jesus were stood before you what would you like to ask him?



Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Holy and Loving God we pray for your world, for the leaders who are making difficult decisions as every day brings new changes and challenges.

Lord of all, Lord for all

Hear our prayer

We pray for our nation, that decisions might be made with wisdom and care for the benefit of all.

Lord of all, Lord for all
Hear our prayer

We pray for Smith Bridge. For all who live here that your peace might reign and that your perfect love might settle our fears.

Lord of all, Lord for all
Hear our prayer

We pray for frontline workers, Drs, nurses, carers, shop workers, refuse collectors, postal workers.

Lord of all, Lord for all
Hear our prayer

We pray for our loved ones, those we know who may be ill, those who are struggling, those who are confused and conflicted. We all know someone.

Lord of all, Lord for all
Hear our prayer

And finally we pray for ourselves, you know what is on our hearts and minds, and so we offer that to you (again you might like to name your own prayers and concerns)

Lord of all, Lord for all
Hear our prayer

AMEN

Say The Lord's Prayer out loud
Our Father

Hymn: Listen to: (Oceans by Hillsongs United)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GGFb6LcX3U>

A prayer of blessing

May you know the deep peace of the God who knows and perfectly loves you.
May you take the yoke of Jesus upon you, knowing that He bears your load with you.
May you know the indwelling Spirit bringing you wisdom and peace.
Amen



Take time to read these passages from the Bible

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 & John 11: 1-45



Do the Right Thing!

Whatever motivates you to do this doesn't matter – whether you say 'what would my mum do', 'what would Mandela do' or 'what would Jesus do', DO THE RIGHT THING and the world will be a better place. God bless

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And finally...

This is an open Newsletter, so would welcome any contributions for articles, letters, comments or inspirational musings. The world is, as Hilda Ogden would always espouse, your lobster. So dig out a string of pearls to add to next week's edition...

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