

An Order for Worship Online

The Lord's Day, March 29, 2020

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

I. CENTERING THE HEART AND MIND FOR WORSHIP

Call to Worship, 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.

The Confession of our Need for Grace

Gentle as the morning rain in Springtime,
Lovely as the crocus under the yew tree,
Lively as the robin, newly returned from Winter,
So the Love of the Creator comes to us:
Ever and always is God's Love.
In our doubt, frustration, and fear,
We hide, and droop, and wither away.
Let us therefore turn our hearts once more
to the One who sends angels to guard us. Let us pray:

Almighty God, who has set in motion a plan for the Fullness of Time, you preserve us with those things needed for life, even when our love fails. Quiet us, in your mercy. Give us sight, by your grace. Revive us, in your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom you have promised reconciliation with you, with ourselves, and with each other. Amen.

The Absolution of Our Sins & the Peace of Christ

Listen to words of Jesus:

*Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.*

And hear what comfortable words the Apostle says:

*If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;
and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,
and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

(Music for Reflection: Ken Medema, "Gentle As Morning")

Gentle as morning, soft as the rainfall,
Fresh as the Springtime is His love.
Pure as the new snow, new as a flower,
Warm as the sunshine is His love.
I feel it in the morning, when the world is chill.
I feel it in the evening, when the air is still.
Tall as a mountain, close as a forest,
Ever and always is His love

LOVE taught the flowers how to grow,
LOVE taught the rivers how to flow,
LOVE taught the eagle how to fly...
LOVE taught the rainclouds how to pour,
LOVE taught the thunder how to roar,
LOVE made the mountains touch the sky...
LOVE made the early morning mind,
LOVE taught the sun and stars to shine,
LOVE taught me how to understand...
LOVE made the bells of Heaven ring,
LOVE taught the people how to sing,
LOVE taught me how to take your hand...

Dear friends, in the Name of Jesus Christ, I say to you that your sins are forgiven. Be renewed in the power of the Holy Spirit and sin no more. And may the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds, now and for evermore. Amen.

II. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Spirit of truth and grace, lift the veil of confusion and anxiety which lies upon your people. Illumine us by the power of the Living Word, that we might see and walk in the Way that leads to life. Amen.

The Prophetic Vision of Ezekiel, 37:1-14

1 The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." 4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6 I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

11 Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' 12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

Here ends the reading.

Observe a moment of silence.

A Song of Victory, Psalm 118:1-25

- 1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
- 2 Let Israel say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
- 3 Let the house of Aaron say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
- 4 Let those who fear the Lord say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
- 5 Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me
and set me in a broad place.
- 6 With the Lord on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?
- 7 The Lord is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
- 8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to put confidence in mortals.
- 9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to put confidence in princes.
- 10 All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
- 11 They surrounded me,
surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
- 12 They surrounded me like bees;
they blazed like a fire of thorns;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
- 13 I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the Lord helped me.
- 14 The Lord is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
- 15 There are glad songs of victory
in the tents of the righteous:
“The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;
16 the right hand of the Lord is exalted;
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.”
- 17 I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.
- 18 The Lord has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.
- 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.
- 20 This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.
- 21 I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
- 22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
- 23 This is the Lord’s doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24 This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
- 25 Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:
world without end. Amen.

The Epistle to the Colossians, 3:1-17

1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8 But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Here ends the reading.

Observe a moment of silence.

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, John 11:1-44

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

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

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

28 When 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." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When 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." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus 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." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 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." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The 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."

The Word of the LORD.
Thanks be to God!

Observe a moment of silence.

Reflecting on the Scriptures, "Practicing Faith"

The readings today lead us to renew our understanding of a basic Christian idea: faith is something you practice. In this, we should recognize that the great miracle of the Gospels is that Jesus, the human person confined to time and space, stays in love with God even when nobody seems to understand who he is or what he is trying to do. We struggle with this, because practicing the faith of Jesus has to do with a long and sometimes painful obedience before we see any results. And instead of taking our cue from the One we call "Lord" we're much more likely to take our cue from folks like Martha.

She imagines that all of God's promises are going to come true at some point in the future. Did you notice that everything Martha says is in a subjunctive or future tense:

"God will give you..." instead of God has given you...

"I know Lazarus will rise... on the last day" instead of I know Lazarus will rise right now...

"I believe you are the Messiah... the one coming into the world..."

Coming into the world?! What a strange this to say to a person who is standing right in front of you! It seems that Martha is so caught up in her beliefs about the future of God's glory that she no longer remembers what to do in the present when all seems lost. I think our spiritual practices are just about as bankrupt as Ms. Martha here.

If you're anything like me, you can hardly manage to observe morning and evening prayer, if you ever do it at all. Be honest now, and think that through...

If you're anything like me, you neglect to shelter your mind with times of silence and fill your emptiness with the "junk food" on TV instead of the stories that might feed your imagination with a new encounter with the Living God!

If you're anything like me, you sometimes find yourself saying, "God could do something about our situation, but God won't, because that would be a miracle I could point to, and those don't really happen anymore."

So - having decided what God will and won't do - we fail to open ourselves to the possibility that God is actually doing something right now. We miss God's ongoing action because, like Martha, and like Ezekiel, we say "God knows...." in response to every question big and small, as if that somehow absolves us from finding out for ourselves! Instead of saying "God knows, but I don't." Why don't we take up the practice of saying things like, "Jesus *does*, so I will!"

Jesus prays with intense emotion, so I will.

Jesus recalls God's faithfulness to Israel, so I will.

Jesus claims God's power, so I will.

Jesus commands the darkness to set us free, so I will!

In the Holy Name of the Father, Jesus opens our graves, so I will!

During these days of being isolated and confined to smaller spaces and frames of mind, it is vitally important that we shake off the idea that we can do nothing, and vigorously take up the tasks of our faith:

intentional prayers, morning and evening, of thanksgiving and intercession...

searching the scriptures...

invoking the Name of God against the power of the Evil One...

connecting with each other and our next door neighbors by any responsible means possible...

sheltering our hearts and minds with periods of wakeful and investigative silence...

These are the practices of our faith at *all* times, but most of all when the crutches of intellectual belief and cultural assumption have been kicked out from under us by our circumstances.

Can the dry bones in your heart live? The only way to find out is to follow the commandment of the Living God and prophesy to those bones! *You must invoke the Breath of God in our heart!*

Can the bands of uncertainty, anxiety, and despair which bind your imagination be cleared away? The only way to find out is to lift your voice and cry out with Jesus, the Christ: In the Name of the Father, unbind me and let me go!

Can you find your way to the spiritual center of your being when you don't have the benefit of corporate worship to help you along? The only way to find out is to sing with the Psalmist:

Open to me the gates of righteousness,

that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord!

Can any person of faith think for a moment that this prayer, offered with a fullness of expectation, will go unanswered?! But if the gates of righteousness open to us... then, by all means dear friends, we had better walk through!

If your spiritual life feels dead because you're on your own, and your resources are limited, and you don't know where to start or how to practice your faith by yourself, let me say that the basics are always the most important thing.

If you will engage in a time of morning prayer and a time of evening prayer, you'll be joining with *millions* of people around the globe in the ancient spirituality of God's people.

If you will search the scriptures carefully and constantly, you'll be opening yourself to the power of the Living Word which lies there, hidden between the lines!

If you will safely reach out to those around you, you will find that you are strong to cast off the weariness of this isolation!

If you will sit in silence and consent to let God fill the emptiness of your questions with love, you will find yourself clothed like the Apostle Paul with, "compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."

There's no secret to experiencing a rich and grounding spiritual life, you see. You just have to practice your faith! If you will, you'll discover and continue to know that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life... right now, wherever you are. If you'll practice your faith, you'll know that Christ is all in all, and that we have absolutely nothing to fear. If you will, you'll have communion with the Spirit, and you will know the Lord, your God, who has opened our graves unto everlasting life.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.
Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above, ye heav'nly host.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Observe a time of silence.

III. The Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from Evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Let us offer our prayers to the source of all love and life, saying,
“Lord, hear our prayer.”

Merciful God, we pray for all who call themselves Christians: that we may become a royal priesthood, a holy nation, in the practice of our faith, to the praise of Jesus Christ our Savior.
Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for David, our Bishop, and for all other ministers: that they may have courage and remain faithful to their calling during this time of crisis; that they might care for the those who are sick and in harm’s way; that they might rightly proclaim the Word of Truth and make present to others the love of Christ by the invocation of the Spirit.
Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for the leaders of the nations, and for all in authority: that they may guide us in the ways of healing, justice, and peace.
Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for Ionia, Muir, and Lyons, and those who live in these places, the poor and the rich, the elderly and the young, those with family and those who are alone: that you will show your lovingkindness to all and inspire in us the mind of Christ.
Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for the victims of domestic and sexual violence: that they might find safe means of communicating with those who can offer protection and healing.
Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who are losing their homes, their livelihoods, their retirement savings, and their communities because of this global sickness called Coronavirus: that society would not forget the poor and them that mourn.
Lord, hear our prayer.

We give you thanks, Almighty God, for the saints of every age, who, by the practice of their faith, revealed your providence in times of adversity and suffering. Especially this day we remember Saint Joseph, the father of Jesus, by whose faithful service in the strength of your love the infant Messiah was protected from all Evil. So enlighten us with the dreams of Joseph, that we might have courage to keep our faith in the face of violence and fear.
Lord hear our prayer.

And now, O God, enter into Holy Communion with us, as we open the secret places of our hearts and consent to receive you:

Observe a time of silence.

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised, through your well-beloved Son, that when two or three are gathered together in your Name you will be in the midst of them: fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of your servants, as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen.

IV. The Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make HIS face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord lift up the light of HIS countenance upon you,
and give you peace. Amen.