

For all who are affected by coronavirus, through illness or isolation or anxiety, that they may find relief and recovery:

Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For those who are guiding our nation at this time, and shaping national policies, that they may make wise decisions:

Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers, that through their skill and insights many will be restored to health:

Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For the vulnerable and the fearful, for the gravely ill and the dying, that they may know your comfort and peace:

Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray, to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The prayer for today: Passion Sunday

Gracious Father,

you gave up your Son out of love for the world: lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion, that we may know eternal peace through the shedding of our Saviour's blood, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

We pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

Our Father who art in heaven

Christ crucified draw you to himself, to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sins forgiven; and the blessing Of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and always. **Amen**

Wheatthill Priory Benefice

"Jesus Lives: Follow Him" **Sunday 29 March Passion Sunday**

This Sunday we find ourselves once again with, no church service and little contact with our wider family or our Church, indeed our churches are now locked.

At 7pm on Sunday night we're all encouraged to light a candle and place it in a window of our homes, a sign of light and life for all, a part of the national day of prayer and action. As a part of this we're also encouraged to continue to pray for the nation and world at this time.

This opening might seem strange, but our lives are scattered & it is good to recognise God's presence with us, and whilst we may not be physically in one place, we are united as the Body Of Christ as we worship in different places.

We come from scattered lives to meet with God.

Let us recognize his presence with us.

Silence is kept.

As God's people we have gathered:

let us worship him together.

Confession

God shows his love for us

in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Let us then show our love for him

by confessing our sins in penitence and faith. *cf Romans 5.8*

We are often slow to follow the example of Christ.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

We often fail to be known as Christ's disciples.

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

We often fail to walk the way of the cross.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

May the Father forgive us by the death of his Son
and strengthen us to live in the power of the Spirit
all our days. Amen.

Reading: John 11:1-45

Friendship and sickness

By all account Mary, Martha and Lazarus were among Jesus' closest friends, He stays with them during the final week of his life (Matthew 21:17), Mary is given permission to sit at his feet, a place usually reserved for (male) disciples of a Rabbi (teacher) (Luke 10:38) and she is also one of those who anoints Jesus (John 12:3). So close friends who are ill, the first instinct is to go and see them, isn't it?

But Jesus doesn't go, he stays where he was, and Lazarus dies. I cannot begin to imagine how disappointed Mary and Martha must have been. Their greatest friend, the one who could work miracles doesn't turn up just when they need him most.

One of the real frustrations of the current situation is that we cannot turn up to visit: be it friends, neighbours, those whom we would like to support and encourage at this time. We're unable to visit those we know who are sick, and some of us are not able to leave our homes except in absolute necessity.

So what does this passage say to us and to the situation in which we find ourselves?

1. Jesus knows: He doesn't leave Martha and Mary out of a callousness or lack of care, but because he cares and wants them to know the full extent of God's love and power. We may at times, feel that we have left, and that the uncertainty is too much and when that happens, like Martha and Mary our best response is honesty with God. @Lord if you had been here...@ Lord why is a question that is regularly asked by the Psalmists!

2. Jesus is disturbed, he weeps at Lazarus grave. We see here his humanity and depth of feeling. A depth of feeling that I believe he still has. I believe that he is disturbed by the effects of this virus on relationships, communities, employment, the NHS staff and much much more. We are not alone.

3. Jesus brings life: Jesus answer to both Martha and Mary is to reassure them that in him is life. 'I am the resurrection and the life'. At the end of our reading Lazarus is raised, he comes out of the grave in his grave cloths, different from the resurrection of Jesus that we'll celebrate (all be it in a more muted way than usual) in two weeks time. And some time later there the family is with Lazarus eating a meal with Jesus (John 12:2). The life that Jesus brings is not constrained by our distancing ourselves from one another or the limits on our movement. His life makes a difference for all time. And for that we give thanks.

Time to pray (prayers from the Church of England website)

Let us pray to God, who alone makes us dwell in safety: