

Words of Welcome

Call to Worship

We watch and wait for You, God our maker.
We watch and wait for You, Lord Jesus Christ.
We watch and wait for You, Spirit of God.

Bring hope.
Bring love.
Breathe life.

[26 March, 5th Sunday in Lent | The Church of Scotland](#)

Hymn

Oh I know the Lord's laid his hand on me

579

Refrain

*Oh, I know the Lord, I know the Lord,
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.
Oh, I know the Lord, I know the Lord,
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.*

1. Did ever you see the like before?
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me;
King Jesus preaching to the poor!
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.

Refrain

*Oh, I know the Lord, I know the Lord,
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.
Oh, I know the Lord, I know the Lord,
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.*

2. Oh, wasn't that a happy day
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me;
when Jesus washed my sins away!
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.

Refrain

3. Some seek the Lord and don't seek him right;
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me;
they fool all day and pray at night,
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.

Refrain

4. My Lord's done just what he said;
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me;
he's healed the sick and raised the dead;
I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.

Refrain

Words and Music: Public Domain (African-American spiritual)

Opening Prayer

O God, we meet this morning as persons who need your forgiveness, seek your love, celebrate your grace. Our spirits rejoice in acknowledging that you have created us and know us better than we know ourselves. We offer this prayer with humble thanks.

Caring God, you see the broken portions of our lives the sharp-edged memories and the jagged emotions that cause us pain. Comfort us, we pray.

Compassionate God, you recognize the frailties of our faith, the buckling-under to injustices and the adopting of beliefs more convenient than compelling. Forgive us, we pray.

Almighty God, you affirm the fragile elements of faith, the delicate beauty of self-giving and the valuable practice of worship. Preserve us, we pray.

In the strong name of Jesus Christ, Teacher and Saviour. Amen.

© Glen E. Rainsley. *Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions*. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P84-85.

Assurance of Forgiveness Psalm 130

If God kept track of all our mistakes—
the harmful things we say and do,
the callous way we sometimes treat the people around us,
the selfishness that puts our needs ahead of the needs of others—
if God kept track, what chance would we have?

But with unfailing love, God offers us forgiveness—
complete forgiveness that erases our sins completely,
and allows us to begin again.

So be at peace – your sins are forgiven!

Praise be to God!

~ Christine Longhurst. [re:Worship: Lent 5 A \(re-worship.blogspot.com\)](http://re-worship.blogspot.com)

Scripture Readings

❖ Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹⁻² GOD grabbed me. GOD's Spirit took me up and set me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them—a lot of bones! There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun.

³ He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Master GOD, only you know that."

⁴ He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones: 'Dry bones, listen to the Message of GOD!'"⁵⁻⁶ GOD, the Master, told the dry bones, "Watch this: I'm bringing the breath of life to you and you'll come to life. I'll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You'll come alive and you'll realize that I am GOD!"

⁷⁻⁸ I prophesied just as I'd been commanded. As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept

watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them.

⁹ He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, son of man. Tell the breath, ‘GOD, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!’”

¹⁰ So I prophesied, just as he commanded me. The breath entered them and they came alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army.

¹¹ Then God said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Listen to what they’re saying: ‘Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, there’s nothing left of us.’”

¹²⁻¹⁴ “Therefore, prophecy. Tell them, ‘GOD, the Master, says: I’ll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people! Then I’ll take you straight to the land of Israel. When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you’ll realize that I am GOD. I’ll breathe my life into you and you’ll live. Then I’ll lead you straight back to your land and you’ll realize that I am GOD. I’ve said it and I’ll do it. GOD’s Decree.’”

❖ John 11:1-45

¹⁻³ A man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. This was the same Mary who massaged the Lord’s feet with aromatic oils and then wiped them with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Master, the one you love so very much is sick.”

⁴ When Jesus got the message, he said, “This sickness is not fatal. It will become an occasion to show God’s glory by glorifying God’s Son.”

⁵⁻⁷ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, but oddly, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was for two more days. After the two days, he said to his disciples, “Let’s go back to Judea.”

⁸ They said, “Rabbi, you can’t do that. The Jews are out to kill you, and you’re going back?”

⁹⁻¹⁰ Jesus replied, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in daylight doesn’t stumble because there’s plenty of light from the sun. Walking at night, he might very well stumble because he can’t see where he’s going.”

¹¹ He said these things, and then announced, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I’m going to wake him up.”

¹²⁻¹³ The disciples said, “Master, if he’s gone to sleep, he’ll get a good rest and wake up feeling fine.” Jesus was talking about death, while his disciples thought he was talking about taking a nap.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Then Jesus became explicit: “Lazarus died. And I am glad for your sakes that I wasn’t there. You’re about to be given new grounds for believing. Now let’s go to him.”

¹⁶ That’s when Thomas, the one called the Twin, said to his companions, “Come along. We might as well die with him.”

¹⁷⁻²⁰ When Jesus finally got there, he found Lazarus already four days dead. Bethany was near Jerusalem, only a couple of miles away, and many of the Jews were visiting Martha and Mary, sympathizing with them over their brother. Martha heard Jesus was coming and went out to meet him. Mary remained in the house.

²¹⁻²² Martha said, "Master, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you."

²³ Jesus said, "Your brother will be raised up."

²⁴ Martha replied, "I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time."

²⁵⁻²⁶ "You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world."

²⁸ After saying this, she went to her sister Mary and whispered in her ear, "The Teacher is here and is asking for you."

²⁹⁻³² The moment she heard that, she jumped up and ran out to him. Jesus had not yet entered the town but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When her sympathizing Jewish friends saw Mary run off, they followed her, thinking she was on her way to the tomb to weep there. Mary came to where Jesus was waiting and fell at his feet, saying, "Master, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³⁻³⁴ When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him. He said, "Where did you put him?"

³⁴⁻³⁵ "Master, come and see," they said. Now Jesus wept.

³⁶ The Jews said, "Look how deeply he loved him."

³⁷ Others among them said, "Well, if he loved him so much, why didn't he do something to keep him from dying? After all, he opened the eyes of a blind man."

³⁸⁻³⁹ Then Jesus, the anger again welling up within him, arrived at the tomb. It was a simple cave in the hillside with a slab of stone laid against it. Jesus said, "Remove the stone."

The sister of the dead man, Martha, said, "Master, by this time there's a stench. He's been dead four days!"

⁴⁰ Jesus looked her in the eye. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

⁴¹⁻⁴² Then, to the others, "Go ahead, take away the stone."

They removed the stone. Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, "Father, I'm grateful that you have listened to me. I know you always do listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I've spoken so that they might believe that you sent me."

⁴³⁻⁴⁴ Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face.

Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him loose.”⁴⁵⁻⁴⁸ That was a turning point for many of the Jews who were with Mary. They saw what Jesus did, and believed in him.

The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

Message To Life!

One of the biggest stories in Canada in the last few years has been the discovery of graves of indigenous children around residential school sites. For years residential school survivors have spoken about the graves, knew they were there, but until that day back in May 2021 in Kamloops they had only their stories, no proof. Thanks to ground penetrating equipment, there is now the evidence to validate the stories and memoirs of those who have spoken out for decades about the death, the loss, and the tragedy.

When those first graves were identified and communities across Canada, people across Canada, tried to make sense or come to grips with the revelation, I too struggled to know how, as a minister of the Presbyterian Church, I was called to respond in this time of national mourning, knowing that the Presbyterian Church had participated in the residential school system. As I pondered and prayed, I had an opportunity to reach out to an indigenous colleague who graciously took time to share with me and talk with me, even as she was mourning with many of her own nation.

It was she who pointed me to the passage from Ezekiel 37, saying, “read the verses of that chapter and in it you will find new meaning about God and death.” The following verses were particularly poignant, “When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you’ll realize that I am God. I’ll breathe my life into you and you’ll live. Then I’ll lead you straight back to your land and you’ll realize that I am God.”

The Bible, whether Old Testament or New, does not shy away from conversations about death. Our belief as Christians is based in the death and resurrection of Jesus, where death does not have the final word, but rather life. Just like the dead and dried up bones in the valley where Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy and life was breathed into the bones, so the story of Jesus is about death and life. The promise of Easter is life, life abundant where we belong to Jesus, to the living God, and from that find meaning and purpose for living in the present, while abiding in the future promise of eternal life.

Again, this week, as last week, the scripture passage we are taking into account is long, but it is a story or at least part of the story, and so to glean wisdom and knowledge from it we need to hear the fullness of the story. This experience, this sign of resurrection, where Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, was the last straw for those in authority. It was after this sign of Lazarus raised that they deemed Jesus just too dangerous, too much of a threat to their power and oversight of the people.

One of the statements that comes just after our reading speaks to this as “the high priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Jewish ruling body. ‘What do we do now?’ they asked. ‘This man keeps on doing things, creating God-signs. If we let him go on, pretty soon everyone will be believing in him and the Romans will come and remove what little power and privilege we still have.’” (v47-48)

So when we think of Easter we are aware that God had a plan through Jesus to redeem us, bring us new life through Jesus’ death. But Jesus was also seen as trouble. A threat to be removed by any means necessary. One thing that has always been sure is that people are people. Everyone of us struggles with sin. When an entire group gets on the band wagon of power, seeing themselves as in the right, not open to be curious about another and what might be going on there, regardless of what position you take...when dialogue is not a possibility, learning not even considered, then to put it mildly, “shit happens”. And it did with Jesus and the plot to kill him.

But before all this concern and reaction there was the background for the reaction, the story of Lazarus, the miracle of life from death. Let’s go back and review. After Jesus heard that his dear friend Lazarus was sick and was summoned, Jesus took his sweet time to arrive in the town of Bethany. We know by the story that Lazarus died, was buried and had been in the tomb four days by the time Jesus shows up on the scene. My understanding is that in the Jewish tradition the belief is that it takes three to seven days for the soul to leave the body. In this instance it may have been that Jesus waited so long to come so that in the sign of resurrection that Jesus would enact with the words, “Lazarus, come out!” there would be no question in the minds of those present that Lazarus was fully dead, no spirit lingering about to bring him back to life. It was Jesus that brought life.

Still, only two verses are given to the actual raising of Lazarus. The majority of the story focuses on the grief being experienced. The words spoken by the two sisters, Martha and Mary, express much of what most of us go through when facing deep grief. “If only.” If only I had noticed the signs. If only he hadn’t gone out and shoveled the snow. If only she wouldn’t have gone out when the weather was so bad. If only we could have gotten better care or treatment. If only I had not lost my job. If only we hadn’t moved. If only they had acted on the pain. If only....name your if only. From Martha and moments later from Mary we hear the words, “If you’d been here, [Jesus] my brother wouldn’t have died.”

I have been wondering about Jesus initial response to those laments. We heard, “When Jesus saw [Mary] sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him.” And then as I read and studied more, I came to understand that the anger was not directed at the sisters, not directed to the mourners with her, but rather his anger was at death itself. You see the one thing Jesus could not and cannot take away from our lives is death. Jesus had even to face his own death. For all that Jesus could do to heal, teach, show compassion and love, he could not remove the sting of death. In this moment with anger and tears mingling together, Jesus wept.

If we speculate, knowing the love that Jesus had for Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Knowing the length to which he went and he knew he was going to go to in order for us to know life through his own death. Knowing that death was going to be a part of the human story until heaven and earth become one. Jesus showed anger and wept.

People often ask “Why God?” when someone dies. The why is that death is part of being human, and to be human is to die. Often, like with Lazarus, it is illness, or it may be calamity that takes those we love the most away from us. Ripping them from us and creating a chasm that is uncrossable. We live in an imperfect world, full of beauty in creation and loving relationships, but also full of fear, harm, and death. And death was the one thing that Jesus could not remove from our living and it made him angry and he grieved it. Jesus wept.

Yet, in Christ, death does not have the last word. Even Martha sensed that there was something more. She said it in her words, that if Jesus had only been there, her brother would not have died. And even now, though her brother is dead Martha states “I know that whatever you ask God he will give you.” And when Jesus said “Your brother will be raised up.” She replied, “I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time.”

She had no idea how immediate the life giver would bring life. Death had its moment, but it was not the final word. Jesus said, “I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believe in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all.”

Every funeral service I lead has these words in it. Right near the beginning I proclaim this promise of Jesus. I don’t know who hears it, really, but it is there. Jesus is the resurrection and life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all!

We believe in the living God. Life is God’s desire for us. Life today, life tomorrow, life eternal. When we talk about sharing the gospel, this is what we are talking about, LIFE! A life that is filled with love, hope, joy, promise, peace, grace, community, and restored relationships. This is the promise for you, for me, and for everyone regardless of culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social or economic status, or whatever other defining boundary you want to add. Life is promised to all.

Our call as the church is to take the bones of those who are dying to poverty, addictions, grief, sorrow, and loss in this life and breath life into them through our love and compassion, our working for justice and equity. It is why we are looking to see as a community of faith, as the people of God, how God is asking us to show love in the world in the year 2023, not as we have done for the last couple hundred years and at St. Andrew’s for the last 113 years, but for our own time.

Life is going to look different than we are used to, whether it is the church or our individual lives. Life is not static, it changes, it grows. We change and grow, and all things experience death, people, creation, and that which we have created by our human hands. But the last word is not death, not for us as individuals who are still inhaling...breathing life giving air, or life-giving Spirit. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in community and communion with one another are Resurrection and Life. Believe in Jesus and live!

Prayers of the People

God of the loving heart,
thank you that in Christ, you call each of us by name and unite us in his body,
the Church. Give us love enough to make a difference in your world,
and trust enough to follow even when the way ahead us is a challenge.

Christ of majesty and mercy,
Bring your compassion to this world once more.

God of peace and promise,
in Christ you call us to love our enemies and to be peacemakers in the word you
love. We pray today for people and places divided by ancient bitterness and current
hostility.

Christ of majesty and mercy,
Bring your compassion to this world once more.

O God of the bruised and broken,
we are grateful that, in Christ, you have taken up the cross and know by heart the
things that bring us suffering and pain. We pray today for all those in need of healing
and comfort, whatever the source of their pain.

O God of the lonely and sorrowing,
in Christ you faced the loss we know when loved ones die or when friends let us
down. We remember before you those who grieve the loss of their beloved and
those who face a lonely future.

Christ of majesty and mercy,
Bring your compassion to this world once more.

O God of hope and new possibility,
in Christ you opened the way into the future for us through the power of your
redeeming love. Give us the courage we need to face our future, assured of your
presence and power to sustain us. We offer all that we are and all that we hope for
through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together as his people:

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 5th Sunday in Lent, March 26, 2023. Year A.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to the offering

God breathes the power of new life into the world through Christ who is both Friend and Saviour to us.

We offer our gifts in gratitude for God's renewing breath, trusting its power will move through our gifts into the world God loves.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 5th Sunday in Lent, March 26, 2023. Year A

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Hymn

O for a thousand tongues to sing

374

1. Oh for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of God's grace.
2. Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
and bids our sorrows cease—
'tis music in the sinner's ears;
'tis life and health and peace.
3. He speaks, and listening to his voice
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.
4. Hear him, you deaf; you voiceless ones,
your tongues again employ;
you blind, behold your Saviour comes,
and leap, you lame, for joy!
5. My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
and spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of thy name.

Words: Public Domain

Benediction

As we move toward Holy Week and turn towards the Cross, remember the words of Jesus:

"I am the resurrection and the life.

Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

So may the tears of the Lord Jesus wash over your sorrows, the Spirit of God dwell in your hearts,

and God's promise of new life lead you through each day ahead.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 5th Sunday in Lent, March 26, 2023. Year A