

Dear friends,

This week we read about the raising of Lazarus. Amid the solemnity of Lent and with the cross not far away, this reading is actually full of hope and the promise of new life. We are, however, encouraged not to race to the place of joy without dwelling first in the place of grief. We are urged to wake up, but first we encounter the darkness. No Easter without Good Friday!

I hope that you are all able to look forward now to Spring coming once again and I wish you all every blessing in your lives. Margaret.

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**Call to worship:**

Weary or wandering, dry, desperate or bursting with new life, we come to worship God and to seek a fresh filling of God's life and Spirit.

Wake us up, Lord, we pray.

Wake us up to the gift of this new day with all its possibilities and to your presence among us.

Wake us again to your goodness and love – and wake us up to all you want us to be and do.

Wake us up to the sorrows and joys of the world around.

Wake us to worship you now. Amen.

God of miracles and wonders, we come before you now in awe that we can call you Father.

As approach the mystery of your divine majesty, we marvel at your love for us, your children and we kneel in worship before you. Amen.

**The words to 'Christ is the world's light' written by Fred Pratt Green [1903-2000] StF 346**

1 Christ is the world's light, Christ and none other; born in our darkness, he became our brother.  
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father: Glory to God on high.

2 Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and none other; no-one can serve him and despise another;  
who else unites us, one in God the Father? Glory to God on high.

3 Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other; sold once for silver, murdered her, our brother –  
he, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father: glory to God on high.

4 Give God the glory, God and none other; give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;  
give God the glory, God with us, my brother: glory to God on high.

**Prayer**

God, creator of the universe – praise be to you for your divine might!

Jesus, saviour of the world – praise be to you for coming amongst us!

Holy Spirit, breath of life – praise be to you for your moving in our hearts! Amen.

Lord, we confess that so often we doubt you, and question your timing as Martha and Mary did.

When we are distressed, we ask why you do not come to our aid immediately.

Forgive us, O Lord, and help us to await your perfect wisdom.

We seek to reaffirm our faith, trust and hope in you.

Awaken us, O Lord, open our eyes to the long view, so that we may set our sights on higher things – the kingdom to come, where there shall be no more sorrow or weeping. Amen.

Our human frailties and failings are great – and yet you forgive them all, Lord.

When our faith falters and is weak, you are strong to forgive and generous in your grace.

When we fall into doubt and mistrust, still we can rest assured in the promise of your forgiveness.

Amen.

Lord Jesus, your life on earth was shadowed by danger. You came from the safety of your Father's kingdom and lived among us in peril from the day you were born – yet still you answered the call of those in need of you. We thank you for being there for us always – reaching out to us when we reach out to you, bringing hope and healing. We thank you for your promise of the kingdom of heaven, where death shall be no more, all hurts shall be healed, and sorrow will cease.

Thank you, Lord, for leading us towards the miraculous day of resurrection to come. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**A reading from the Gospel of John [11: 1-45] - taken from a translation made by Katie Thompson and found in A Common Worship Year A Miscellany published by copyright 2004 Kevin Mayhew Limited and compiled by Nick Fawcett.**

Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, were very good friends of Jesus. They lived in a town called Bethany, not far from Jerusalem.

One day, the sisters sent an urgent message to Jesus, because Lazarus was very ill and close to death. When he heard this message, Jesus said: 'This illness will not bring death for Lazarus, but glory for God and his Son.' And he did not set off immediately, even though he was very fond of Lazarus and his sisters.

When Jesus and his disciples arrived in Bethany more than two days later, they found that Lazarus was dead and had already been buried for four days.

Martha ran to meet Jesus, and said to him: 'Lord, if you had been here, you could have saved our brother.'

Jesus said: 'Your brother will live again.'

'I know that on the last day he will come back to life,' she answered.

Jesus turned to her and said: 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will have eternal life, and he will never die. Do you believe this?'

Martha answered him: 'Yes, Lord, because I know that you are the Christ, the Son of God.'

When Jesus saw the great sadness of Martha and Mary and their friends, he wept with love and sorrow. 'Show me where he is buried,' he said. So they took him to the tomb, where Jesus said to them: 'Roll away the stone, and you will see God's glory.'

'Lord,' said Martha, 'Lazarus has been dead for four days and by now he will smell.'

Jesus said to her: 'You will see God's glory if you believe in me.'

So they did as he said, and, looking up to heaven, Jesus prayed: 'Father, I thank you, for I know that you always listen to me. Let these people see and believe.' Then he called out in a loud voice: 'Lazarus, come out!'

To everyone's amazement, Lazarus appeared, still wrapped in burial cloths, and walked from the tomb. Many people saw what happened that day, and they believed in Jesus.

**Reflection: taken from A Common Worship Year A Miscellany compiled by Nick Fawcett and published by Kevin Mayhew Limited [Copyright 2004 Kevin Mayhew Limited.]**

Have you ever admired an intricate and detailed piece of needlework or tapestry, and marvelled at the thousands of threads and stitches which together create the picture? If we stand too close to such a piece of work it can be hard to make out what it is; we need to stand back and appreciate and understand the image before us. If you ever turn such a marvellous creation over and look at the back of the piece of work you would be equally amazed to see a jumble of intricate knots and loose threads. The whole thing looks a complete mess, and it is almost impossible to guess what the picture on the other side might be.

Life can be compared to such a tapestry, with God the master weaver the only one who knows what the final picture will look like. As he busily weaves and helps us to direct the threads of our lives it is as though we are standing at the back of the tapestry where we are unable to make out the final picture. We must trust him to direct our efforts, even at times when things seem to be going badly in our lives. When someone we know or love dies, we can find it difficult to understand why such a sad thing has happened. We are unable to 'see' where it fits into God's plan for the tapestry of life. For a time it can seem that our sadness and grief will stop us from working that piece of that tapestry ever again. It is difficult to understand how life goes on as normal, as people around us go about their everyday business, and seem unaware of our heartache and sorrow. Our lives and the lives of those around us can take twists and turns like threads, and we can see no pattern nor make any sense of the direction they sometimes take. We cannot see the final picture which God is in the process of creating.

When someone dies, Jesus understands our feelings of grief and shares our sadness and loss in a very special way. But he also gives us hope and the joyful promise of everlasting life with him.

Although it is right that we express our sadness when someone dies, it is also good to celebrate their life and to rejoice at their happiness of finding peace with God in the place he has prepared especially for them in heaven.

There they are able to stand on the other side of the tapestry and see the final picture of God's glory. They will finally be able to understand how the twists and turns in their lives were all part of God's elaborate plan as the threads of their life become part of his wonderful tapestry.

**Prayer: [taken from The Common Worship Year A Miscellany. Details as above]**

With love in our hearts, let us unite as one family to ask God for all our needs:

Christ was driven away by those who did not listen or understand.

May people who are driven from their homes, their families and their land find forgiveness in their hearts and comfort in their sorrow.

Christ was betrayed and let down by his friends:

may we be forgiven for the times when we betray his friendship and turn our backs on his love and the love of others.

Christ was imprisoned and tortured for the sake of his goodness.

May all who suffer such cruelty and imprisonment for just causes be strengthened by their closeness to God and our cries for freedom.

Christ wept at the death of his friend Lazarus.

May the tears of sadness of those who mourn for a loved one become tears of joy with the promise of their resurrection and eternal life.

Christ was laid in the darkness of the tomb.

May those whose lives are overshadowed by sadness and grief be enlightened by the knowledge that Christ shares their sorrow – and may they draw comfort from his presence

Lord God, we ask you to receive our prayers and answer them according to your holy will.

We make these prayers through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Loving God, grant to those who grieve your special blessing. May they know that your hand is upon them, your arms encircling them, and your heart reaching out to them.

May all who mourn discover the comfort you have promised, and find strength to face tomorrow, until that time comes when light shall dawn again and hope be born anew.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Close:**

Lord, we know that you have never promised that life would be easy and trouble free.

We are aware that you promised that following you would involve carrying a cross.

We commit ourselves to trust you and to walk with you,  
for you have promised to walk with us to the end and beyond.

We commit ourselves to share in the hurt and pain of others  
and to hold them in Christ's love and in his name. Amen.

Lord, we have asked for your mercy – help us to offer it to others.

We have sought forgiveness – enable us to share it with others.

We have received your love – help us to show it to others.

We have experienced your joy – make us examples of hope for others.

We have received your peace – make us channels of peace to our neighbours.

We have worshipped you here – send us out to praise you everywhere.

We have trusted you here and shared our faith together – now go with us so that our commitment to Christ may bring forth fruits of love, hope, joy and peace for our neighbour.

In the name of him who calls and sends us. Amen.

**[Both prayers written by David Clowes – '500 Prayers for All Occasions' Copyright 2003 David Clowes. Published by David C. Cook, Kingsway Communications Ltd.**

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