



## If Only (you had been here...)

Interactive style

A service of worship to guide individual reflections for 29 March 2020 - 5<sup>th</sup> Week of Lent, leading up to Easter

For the followers of Jesus, Lent has long been a time of reflection, restraint and even reparation. This year we are connecting our journey through Lent with the rhythms of the season and acknowledging that the planet, like ourselves has moved off course. We begin with a picture of deforestation in Brazil that contrasts the green biodiversity of the forest with the dry bareness of the ground cleared for cattle and crops.



We remember that in human life there are times of bareness and loss as well as of growth and rejuvenation. Jesus visited his friends Mary and Martha after their brother had died and, when it seemed he was too late to save Lazarus, Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

**We pray:** Lord you have given us joy through life and an awareness of death. In our times of emptiness when we wonder where you are: help us to know the constancy of your presence. When we are impatient and desperate for a better outcome: grant us patience and faith. At times of bereavement and pain: may we walk in true solidarity with those who suffer. Like you, may we cry out from the depths of our being and experience true empathy: with Mary and Martha may we live to glimpse your glory and share your hope. Amen.

### Worship Songs

'Father of life, draw me closer' (Hillsong):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adhfUSF2x-4>

'To you we bring our hymn of praise (Glory be to God)' (Kelly Minter)

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

### Prayer

Offer yourself to God in worship and open yourself to the close presence of God. Offer praise to God, and bless the Lord. Offer your faults to God and open yourself to the renewing power of God's Spirit.

### Lord's Prayer

### Reading John 11, 1-45

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11&version=GNT>,

and/or watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dca8SSxXCmM>

### Reflection

John's gospel contains a series of 'Signs' to show who Jesus is. Here we have a sign that Jesus restores life to those who believe. It looks forward to the resurrection of Jesus himself, but it also stands on its own as part of the full 'good news' story, echoing several of the gospel's themes - e.g. showing God's glory (verse 4), light compared to darkness (verses 9 & 10), birth and rebirth (verses 23-25), and come and see (verses 34 & 45): but there are several more!

Martha and Mary were upset when Jesus didn't come to them straight away: if only he had been there, then Lazarus wouldn't have died. The rest of the mourners (standing perhaps for the early Christian community) take the same view (verse 37): it's a natural reaction. But Martha and Mary's criticism of Jesus is actually in part a statement of belief as well as one of reproach. They believe that Jesus has the power to do something, even though they do not yet fully understand. That was true for the original readers of the gospel, and probably for most of us too!

In fact, Jesus is present, even when he isn't present! As the Resurrection and the Life (verse 25), Jesus is telling them that he is always there, to comfort and to support. He also brings the promise that the life of faith begins now with belief in him, and continues when we die.

### **Questions to Ponder**

- How often have you felt 'if only' something had or hadn't happened, or someone should or could have been there when you needed them?
- At this particular time and in current circumstances, you may be thinking 'if only Jesus was here...' When have you felt let down by Jesus, or doubted his presence with you, perhaps when life seems to fall apart?

We need to hear the message of hope, and feel the reassurance of the continuing presence of Jesus at this, and all, times.

- What might help you to know that Jesus is with you even when you are sad, worried or anxious?
- How might you experience a transformed life, beginning now and stretching beyond earthly life?
- In our world right now, how can you be the presence of Jesus, spreading the message of hope?

### **Worship Song**

'When my fears are overtaking (You are my peace)' (Lou Fellingham)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2a87BDI\\_7k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2a87BDI_7k)

### **Prayers**

Pray for yourself:

Thank you, Lord, for your constant presence. Thank you for holding us and comforting us. Thank you for crying with us when we are hurting. Thank you for weeping with us when we are broken-hearted. Thank you, Lord, that you never let us down and that you always give us hope. God of new life, we give you thanks and praise today. God of new life, God of risen hope, as we worship today, may we know your resurrection power in our lives. May our spirits be renewed. May our bodies be restored. Amen.

Pray for others, perhaps using the following refrain after each group/situation on your mind:

Come, Lord: restore, renew, revive your people.

### **Worship Songs**

'See Martha weeping at a tomb' (Simon Brading):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXEwS1OfCLY>

'There is a Hope' (Stuart Townend): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCQj5zU6PPI>

### **Blessing**

God of hope, heal me and restore me, that I may know your resurrection power in my life. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen