Lent 5A 2020

March 29, 2020

Collect: Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Gospel Reading – John 11: 1 – 53

**Believers never abandoned to death but now in Jesus live the resurrected life**

This reading of Jesus raising Lazarus could not have come at a better time. Life is given through His Word as He shouts passed the opened grave to a man wrapped up like a mummy and stinking of death: Lazarus, come out!

Only the word of Jesus can give life. We could stand all day and shout at cold graves and mounting coffins for the dead to return, but would that help? We who are mortal and captive to death have no choice but to give up our breath when death comes, but Jesus, Jesus who is First and Last, did not have to die but holds Life and Death in His hands, shouts and Life returns!

The angry mob shouted on Good Friday not for life but for His death! Crucify! Crucify their throats screamed! The government listened and put an Innocent One to death in a horrible miscarriage of justice.

Jesus now speaks to a wrapped-up Lazarus and death gives up its prey! Breath returns to lungs with no aid of ventilators, blood circulates and warms, with no aid of medicine or IVs. See how His words are stronger than death!

And so it will be on the Last Day when all the dead will hear Him and stand up on the earth and see Him who is Resurrection and Life! Those who have the Spirit given life of sin forgiven will be raised to eternal life, those who had no ears to hear His words, to everlasting shame and contempt.

It is refreshing to note that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, there is no talk of the cause of death or a coroner’s report or of an autopsy. It doesn’t matter how death comes, but that it is inevitable. What matters is the Word of God who is Life and Resurrection. This is the perfect antidote to ears over-saturated with words like corona and covid, eyes that are bombarded with mounting coffins and rising death tolls and hearts anxious over the next paycheque or the stranger who might be an unsuspecting carrier.

The corona virus will come to its end. All threats to our bodies will cease. Not because we found the cure or have outsmarted death with AI or medical research but because God says so! In fearing threats of viruses and bankruptcies as the chief enemy idolizes them. It makes gods of them. If we would only believe that our Lord’s good news of life and salvation is more important than breaking news of epicenters of the virus or conspiracies behind the outbreak.

Lord have mercy! When we spend our days in fretting and forgetting how lovely and soul refreshing are your Words. You will never abandon us to the grave! You are our Life and our First Love! You laid down your life in love for your Father and for all of us that we may live.

When Jesus came bursting forth from the tomb on Easter morn, it was because He took back His life. In his tomb were found the strips of linen and his face cloth neatly folded like freshly washed laundry. Eye-witnesses saw it.

When Lazarus was summoned from his grave, his hands and feet were still bound with linen strips and his face was still wrapped with a death cloth. Why the difference? Not only would he die for a second time, but the sinful nature still clung to him. Not so with Jesus. He died once and for all as the Conquering Victorious Saviour. He rose never to die again with no stain of sin.

Jesus commanded the astonished watchers of the dead man raised to “Unbind him, and let him go.” With his word, the clothes of the dead fall to the ground as in holy absolution our sins all fall to the ground. Because Jesus loosens our sins from us, our sin and guilt no longer bind us.

With one word combined with the water of your baptism, you are buried with Christ and rise to new life, His life, each and every day in His Resurrection! You are His baptized child and you live now not your own life but His resurrected life.

That’s why we do not play games with people when we encourage the baptized to remember their baptisms on a daily basis or when we celebrate our monthly baptisms at the birthday luncheons.

That’s why we are very honest and truthful with people when we push them to recognize their self-absorption and self-made idols, to repent and confess their sin, and to receive the Lord’s very own Forgiveness rather than seeking the best therapist or support group the world can offer. All their words will be swallowed up in death. With His word, death is no more!

That’s why we are not running our mouths with people when we remind them that of all the food they could ever eat, none is more vital than the Body and Blood of their Lord. Indeed from His hand, when He opens his hand, grocery shelves are replenished and pharmacy medicine is available, but from His mouth, when He says take, eat my body, come and drink my blood in the cup, He gives better food than the world knows, but eternal life with Him.

All the blessings of Life and Resurrection come to us now not later. Lazarus found that out. Mary and Martha saw it. Jesus is our Life and Resurrection now. Although we are living in strange times when we cannot celebrate His Supper, we wait and long for it like Israel in the Babylonian Captivity when life was not normal and they longed for Jerusalem and the worship in her temple. The days of self-isolation will come to an end. The time for Holy Communion will return, and we will come together after these dark days and feast with Him. Fear not! Christ Jesus has not abandoned us. He is our Life and Resurrection even now and forever!

Please remember to pray for: Fran Van Vorst; Dennis Whalley; Jane Ibbott; Anne Carson; Bob Rodmell; Ray Robertson and Lorna Murray, as well as;

For Friends and Fellow Christians: Dan Cunningham who has cardiac trouble; Rosa McLean whose mother died in Columbia; Rev. Les & Lyn Hohner; Marlene Bowen; Donna & Walter Mckinnon; Chris Burant; Susan Stiglick; Heather Knapp; George & Waldtraut Chelaru; Mardelle Baier; Gheorghe Preda; Corrina Marsh; Jason Swann and the Christians in China as Wuhan province bulldozes the churches and all religious places of worship.