

Worship in Times of Isolation from The Centre for Music, Liturgy and the Arts

**Worship on the sofa...
or at an appropriate distance in comfy seats in the family room**



CALL TO WORSHIP

If you are a Facebook user, you may have seen memes like this one:

'My grandparents fought wars for me, the least I can do is sit on the sofa for them.'

So, come sit on the sofa and settle in for a while, feel the warmth of the company of God, who chooses life, not in a simple 'get all you want' or not, kind of way, but in the richness of journeying through every circumstance, into every valley, every dark place and beyond. Here in this place, even though you might be separated from your usual community, come to worship.

ADORATION

As I sit here, I feel God's care for me,
I am confident the Creator of the world is with me,
nestled in this house,
and yet in deep connection with all that is,
steadfast and constant in strange times.
God's word is hope,
it calls us forward,
it is calling to us to be people of grace,
it calls us to life.

CONFESSION

A Prayer of Confession:

These are tough times God, and while there is a lot that calls me to be strong, there are moments when I am fragile, and I give in to the things in my life that are not life giving. Some days they sap the life out of me, they take me to a dark place, they make me doubt my worth, they make me harden my heart. They're the things I wish I'd done better, actions and words I regret, worry and uncertainty that tip my equilibrium and can immobilise me. Quietly and in the comfort of your steadfast care, God, I name them.

ASSURANCE

An act of assurance:

Stand up, shake yourself off and brush away the things you've named that are weighing you down. Picture them dissipating in some way, perhaps rolling out the door and fading as they roll on into the distance. Once they're gone, sit back down. As you resettle into the comfort of the sofa, know God is on your side, calling you by name, calling you out of the dark and into life. You can be assured of this.

Song: You are mine

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

THANKSGIVING

Gratitude is an important practice, the German mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, 'If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.'

Take note of where you are and of the things that please you and give you joy – a comfy seat, the dog/cat/turtle/lizard, the artwork, figurines and bric-a-brac, books, the things collected over your lifetime. Give thanks for these gifts.

Who is around you? If not physically, in photos and mementos and gifts. As you look around give thanks for what these people bring to your life.

What in the last few days has been lifegiving for you? Give thanks for these things.

Also, give thanks for the community of the church who continues to pray and is working creatively to be active in the world in strange and uncertain times.

All we have comes from God, given not because we are exceptional but because God is exceptionally good.

THE WORD

John 11:1-45 (NRSV)

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness

does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles[e] away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."
⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Reflection:

This is a strange story that speaks to these strange times. Here are several ways to enter into today's reading about Lazarus.

Artwork:

Visual artist, Monica Dyer, writes, '*One of the things that struck me was that everyone gets their point of view except the person whose existence is changed the most.*' View her painting of Lazarus here:

<https://www.monicaayer.net/blog-1/2018/3/17/asel8xbwryjo8c5286s1a07ng1a28n>

Here are two expressions of what Lazarus' point of view may have been.

Music:

Malcolm Gordon's song '*Lazarus*' on the album '*Into the Deep*' can be found here:

<https://www.onevoice.org.nz/songs/>

Poetry:

In his poem '*When the Panic*', Mark Tredinnick talks about emerging from a dark place, here is an excerpt:

...when

*Hope becomes a harder case than you know how to make;
When the floor drops from under everything you thought*

*You were and meant and knew; when the world shrinks
Back to shibboleth and nothing peaceful anywhere knows*

*The letters of your name—I want you to remember this:
The panic passes, the fear will end; the pieces into which*

*Your days have frayed and fallen will become a life
Again, ...*

You may like to consider the following questions:

- What was it like to be Lazarus?
- What is it like to be suddenly thrust from one circumstance to another?
- Have there been times in your life like that?
- How have you found your way in these circumstances?
- The resurrection of Lazarus was an act of love. We are in times when we may feel like we are entombed by an event in which we have no agency, yet as people of faith we believe God is even in this. Where, in these days, have you heard God calling to you, where have you felt the love of Christ?

Family time around the word:

Cover yourselves with a blanket or something that can make where you are a dark place. Settle in there until your eyes get used to the dark. What's it like being there? What is easy, what is hard? Throw the blanket off yourselves. What's this like? Is there anything surprising about suddenly coming out into the light? We have many promises from God, God is with us in everything, God doesn't go away when things are scary or sad or confusing or strange, in fact surprisingly, it's often in those times when God is most near.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE

What will we pray today, God? Sometimes it's hard to express what we need to, be patient with us as we our best to give word to what is in our hearts.

We pray for all those who have lost their jobs and businesses that have had to close – you may like to name people and businesses you know.

We pray for those who are providing support to those in need – community workers, aid agencies;

We pray for those who bring healing – health workers, care givers, ecologists, land carers;

We pray for those who look for solutions – mathematicians, scientific researchers, economists, engineers and philosophers;

We pray for those who offer beauty to us – poets and musicians, storytellers and artists, the natural world in all its wonderful forms;

We pray for those who bring us joy – cartoonists, comedians, jovial friends, and people who post video of their pets doing outrageous things on the internet;

We pray for those who make sure our physical needs are met – farmers and gardens, utility workers, transport workers;

We pray for those things that offer us hope – people engaged in acts of kindness and
We pray for those who comfort us – friends and family, counsellors, ministers and
pastors;
moments of compassion, and the uninterrupted cycles of the sun, moon and stars.

We do not close our eyes to the needs of the world that lie outside of what is in
front of us – we pray for those still living in conflict, those displaced from their
homes, those oppressed by powerful regimes.

We pray for each other – that each of us will offer our gifts, not matter how small to
bring light and life to our world.

Song: Create in me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noUeQQ64Q1I>

BLESSING

We are God's beloved people,
May you hear God calling to you in whispers of serenity
as we continue to be God's children,
people of goodwill and mercy and life,
through all that is and all that will be.

