A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’ 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.’ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’ 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. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ Jesus, however, had been speaking of death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘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. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’ 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.’ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 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. 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.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 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.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. 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.’ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ 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.’ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

John 11.1–45

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law – indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Romans 8.6–11

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Churchwardens: David Simpson & a Vacancy
Readers: Farhad Hedayati & Flis Banks
Pastoral Visitor (SPA): Sarah Castle
Director of Music: Tom Theakston

Sunday 29 March 2020
Fifth Sunday of Lent—Passiontide

Collect
Gracious Father, you gave up your Son out of love for the world: lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion, that we may know eternal peace through the shedding of our Saviour’s blood, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Green Prayer
Lord, as we begin to see the radical transformation needed in our society if we are to meet the crisis of climate change, we pray and beseech you to raise up and empower the leaders of the future who will challenge the forces of inertia and inspire us all to think and act as if we, individually and collectively, bear full responsibility for the lifestyle changes that we must all make if coming generations are to survive. Amen.

Post Communion
Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you: give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all, and gave up your life and died for us, but are alive and reign, now and for ever. Amen.

Sunday 29 March 2020
Fifth Sunday of Lent—Passiontide

Amen.
FOR OUR PRAYERS

Those who are ill or in need:
Michael Green; Jenny Smith; Sarah Pitman; Hilary Brazier; Judith Sanson; Joyce Smith; Sachin Shah.

Pray also for those who have the COVID-19 virus including Ian, Lucy and Ellie Christie.

Those who have died: Two former members of Christ Church have recently died: CYNTHIA WILKES—we pray for Peter Camage, her son, and for all the family. ALAN COX—we pray for Madeleine Cox, his wife, and for all the family.

Those whose anniversary of death falls this week: Glenys Knight-Smith (1981); Olive Mousell (2007); Alexander Aird (1979)

Link Parish of St Francis of Assisi, Barham Green, Zimbabwe

NEXT SUNDAY 5 APRIL 2020
Palm Sunday

Today, Passion Sunday, is the start of the 14 days leading up to Easter, the start of a solemn period in the calendar of the Church, a time when Christians particularly seek to draw closer to Christ as he faces his last days. In our Gospel, we hear the whole long and detailed story of Lazarus and his sisters. It is an evocative story, with Jesus perhaps portrayed at his most human but also perhaps showing signs of petulance. Why did he delay? Were his actions foolish? What about those conversations, first with Martha and then with Mary? In this reading, it seems that John wants to tell us some deep truths about both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. The practical, less emotional Martha is better able to grasp the logic of what it means for the Lord of life to be present, whereas Mary is simply devastated and feels deeply wounded by the absence of Jesus, which doesn’t make any sense to her — and probably doesn’t make much sense to us either.

But maybe also John is trying to remind us, his readers, that we may well recognise a similar sense of loss and distance when in our own lives we feel God ought to be there, yet seems not to be. Jesus himself was to know it on the cross — “My God, why have you forsaken me?” But the story ends well because Jesus brings Lazarus back to life. Jesus, his friend, breaks into the place of death; and Lazarus, hearing his name being called, walks out into life again towards that voice.

There are probably few of us here who can fail to identify with something here, particularly during these strange and frightening days that we are all experiencing. We have to cling on and remember that Jesus calls each of us by name. He calls into the place where we are, even if that place is full of darkness and sadness. Illness, death, grief and reproach are all part of our experience of being human. Jesus does not simply make it all better — he clearly suffers too. John shows this by the words of verse 35 — which is the shortest sentence in the whole Bible — “Jesus wept”.

Yet Jesus knows that God does care because God is in all human suffering, however foolish that truth may sound. What is perhaps different in this story is that Jesus brings a sense of perspective — so he doesn’t foolishly rush like a mad thing to the house but deliberately takes his time. Wherever we are, Jesus keeps calling because he wants to bring us into his new life. As Jesus breathes life into us, it can make such a difference that many will wish they had responded years ago.

Above all, in this story we have a strong hint and clue of what is to come in the approaching days. John’s clear message to the sisters — and to us — is that Jesus is the resurrection and the life — foolish as those words may sound to the rest of the world. God is with us — and he will never leave us—and these words have a particular poignancy and relevance for us during these worrying days when we are all now confined to our homes.

But hold on to that profound and immovable truth — that God is with us through Jesus who is the resurrection and the life — and for that certainty, we can give real thanks to God. Amen.

Eternal Father, look with love on your people of Christ Church and pour upon us the gifts of your Spirit. Although we are apart, draw us to you and to one another, so that by our growing love and unity we may bring healing and life to all. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Dean of Southwark has written the following prayer which you may wish to use:

A prayer in lockdown
The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked.
(John 20.19)

Ever present God, be with us in our isolation, be close to us in our distancing, be healing in our sickness, be joy in our sadness, be light in our darkness, be wisdom in our confusion, be all that is familiar when all is unfamiliar, that when the doors reopen we may with the zeal of Pentecost inhabit our communities and speak of your goodness to an emerging world. For Jesus’ sake. Amen