

South Elkhorn Christian Church
Digital  *Liturgy*

March 22, 2020

PREPARE

Locate a candle to light and communion elements to use (bread/juice or whatever is available to you).

Find a quiet place by yourself or with others.

Read through the instructions, prayers, scripture, and questions below. You can also find a guided, voice-led version of this digital liturgy at southelkhorncc.org/digital-liturgy

WELCOME THE LIGHT

Welcome to worship with South Elkhorn Christian Church. Light a candle if you are able and receive these words:

CALL TO WORSHIP

This is the day that the Lord has made!

Let's be glad!

Let's be joyful!

This is the day that the Lord has made!

CENTERING & LORD'S PRAYER

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow,

You are right here, right now, right where we are. Help us to pause and listen, to sense and notice.

We are now three plus weeks into this unexpected adventure in distancing, disruption, and disease. And perhaps we are already fed up and worn out, maybe even fatigued and frightened. How long will this last? How much can we take? What will be the final toll?

These questions do not evaporate before You. You hear our cries and know our heartache. You shoulder our uncertainty and hold us in our distress. You receive our emptiness and weariness. You meet us just as we are--expecting no more, and loving us no less.

And you whisper your hope to us, if we will receive it. You nudge us toward that deeper spiritual truth that You waste no moment. Every moment you are willing to meet us, shape us, and make us new. Even these moments we are in now, especially these moments. So help us to open our hearts, minds, and spirits to you, wherever we are and whatever we are going through. Remind us that your Resurrection Life, your New Life, always passes through the pain, heartache, and uncertainty of the present--it did for Jesus, and it will for us too. Yes, even when we are couped up with our kids, cut off from people we love, knocked down by financial distress, disoriented by an unfamiliar life rhythm, and yes even as death and disease threaten and spread. Help us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to pause and grieve, indeed weep if we need to, just as Jesus did for his friend Lazarus. And help us to lead with love, to sacrifice for our neighbors, and to grow in compassion, just as Jesus did for his friends... and for us.

Help us be ready as well, for that mysterious and beautiful Resurrected Life, that New Life, that is already happening, growing from the soil of our distress, if we will ready ourselves to welcome it. Your new life is not reserved for some heavenly, otherworldly realm or moment, but comes crashing into our world, often when we least expect it... like right now.

God you waste no moment, help us not waste these moments either. But instead dig deep into what really matters, dig deep into the courage and creativity you have given us, dig deep into the new shapes of community that are emerging, dig deep into our resolve and resiliency that are reflections of your unwavering love, dig deep into the sacrificial love you made known to us in Jesus Christ, the one who taught his disciples to pray, and teaches us to patiently pray yet again...

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will

be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

John 11:1-44

Now 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 about his 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 began to weep. 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 upward 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.”

SERMON

Social distancing. Perhaps that’s not the best way to describe it, more like “Physical distancing.” It’s an action we know well by now, staying far enough apart from each other to protect ourselves, our families, and help our community get through this season of virus spread and illness. It’s a hard activity to engage in. There are consequences: economic fallout, psychological isolation, cabin fever, to name but a few... and I’ve experienced all these already. Perhaps you have, too.

It can easily become a time of disillusionment, distraction-driven escapism, despair.

And yet it matters that we do this. It matters that we sacrifice to keep each other safe and healthy, that we do whatever we can to keep our health system from being over-run, that we protect the most vulnerable among us. It is nothing short of Christ-like sacrificial love...

And it matters that Jesus did this, too. Social distancing. Physical distancing. From Lazarus.

Of course, Jesus had different reasons for doing so than we do, today. Reasons that are easy to miss. Easier to misinterpret. And yet sacrificial through and through...

Jesus wasn't concerned about catching whatever Lazarus suffered from. That wasn't the issue. He wasn't concerned about spreading Lazarus' affliction--that wasn't the danger.

And he wasn't trying to make a spectacle of Lazarus, callously letting him die so people could simply see how awesome, powerful, and miraculous Jesus was--bolstering his image. This is the one that gets me hung up, it's my first reaction to this story--Jesus the jerk who lingers long enough that Lazarus would die... isn't there a better way to show off God's glory than to let someone suffer, to bring preventable grief and anguish to his family. My sense of God does not square with this theological Public Relations stunt. I don't believe God brings suffering on people--no, the God revealed in Jesus joins people in suffering, and through love can make something new from it.

This story doesn't seem to fit...

But perhaps I've misunderstood Jesus' important phrase: "God's glory." And perhaps I've missed altogether what it means for Jesus to say that the Son will be "glorified."

In John's gospel, the glory of God is not power, prestige, or privilege; it is not spectacle, image, or office; Glory isn't a bejeweled crown, legions of soldiers, or a social septor; it is not miraculous might or religious right-ness; no, Glory is very different. God's glory is Christ crucified and risen. Glory is sacrificial love surprising us with new life.

And if we missed it in Jesus' talk of "glory"... well Thomas makes it plain to us in that easy to miss comment to the disciples... "Let us also go [to Judea, to Lazarus], that we may die with him." I often imagine that being said in an exasperated, maybe even sarcastic, tone... but maybe it's not meant that way. It is deeply, profoundly true. It's what would happen next. Because of what Jesus does with Lazarus in the very next scene after the passage we read, we learn that the religious authorities are threatened by Jesus, worried that Rome will come and wipe out the Jewish people because of their rabble-rousing

prophets and teachers; so why not take care of this Jesus fellow and keep the peace with Rome? Lazarus is the catalyzing, climactic moment that leads to the cross for Jesus...

And Jesus fully anticipates this... and chooses it. He chooses his own death as life for Lazarus. And for us.

You see Lazarus is us. We learn early in the story that he is “the one whom Jesus loves” and this is not a tangential detail; it’s an invitation to see that Lazarus represents all who Jesus loves, all of us, humanity and creation itself, God’s beloved. And there is no escaping death. No escaping disease. No escaping difficulty and suffering and grief.

The crazy part, the good news, the really good news, is that new life can emerge in the midst of all that—even here, even now. It’s peculiar that Lazarus is raised before Jesus... Lazarus experiences new life before and not after the death and resurrection of Christ. That is yet another reason Jesus waits, keeps his distance, and it’s easy to miss. Martha misses it. She tells Jesus, “yes, we know, we know, Lazarus has new life in heaven, he’ll be raised at the end of time.”

Jesus says, “not quite martha.” Lazarus can have new, resurrected life now.

This may be as shocking today as it was in that moment for Martha. Resurrection breaks into our present, invites us to new life, now. It is not reserved for the after-life, for some distant heavenly realm. And it’s not reserved for when things are cheery, normal, bright. No, new life with Christ is already; it is right here, emerging in the mess of disease, affliction, grief, and sacrifice.

If the social distancing we enact now is a Christ-like sacrifice, it’s also an invitation to new life... a new life that doesn’t need to wait for “normal”... Can you see it? I heard it in the bells that rang out from South Elkhorn last Sunday, and that are now rung each day at 10:00AM, so that those isolated might know they are not alone. I see it in the creativity and commitment of families to worship in new ways together--watching worship and wonder stories, taking communion with crackers and milk, lighting a candle in living rooms, kitchens, and backyards. I see it in the silly videos meant to spread joy, I hear it in phone calls to connect with those who are isolated. I feel it in the generous donations to causes that sustain life, that help people in economic distress, and witness to a greater love. I see it when people choose not to hoard supplies at the store and leave some for others. I see it as people turn their attention toward the well being of their neighbors, caring for the most vulnerable.

God doesn’t cause suffering, illness or death. God joins us there, and weeps with us, as

Jesus did with his friends. We can lament, grieve, and be frustrated with life under these conditions. God doesn't reject that. God embraces us right there--is moved by our pain. No, God doesn't cause suffering and death, God only ever causes new life. And so invites us to see that resurrection is still ready to happen right here, right now.

God doesn't waste a life--not Lazarus, not yours, not mine. God makes new life available to us every minute of every day, if we will but just receive it, embrace it, lean into it.

God doesn't waste a single moment, especially not this one, especially not right now.

We don't have to either.

Resurrection is already going on--in you, if you'll let it. Resurrection is already going on in your neighborhood, if you'll notice it. Resurrection is already taking shape in our community, if we'll join it.

And when we do, even if we are distanced and staying put at home, we'll know what it means to be called out of the tomb of despair, discouragement, and disillusionment, and be set free; truly, spiritually free.

COMMUNION

Place before you bread and a cup of juice (or whatever you have on hand to use). If you are with others, serve one another with the blessing, "The bread of life, the cup of hope."

The Lord be with you,

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

The communion elements before you unite us in Christ's Spirit one to another. Christ's life, death, and resurrection unite us to God's infinite and all-inclusive Love. All are welcome to the Table, and all are invited to remember...

THE BREAD

"The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it..."

Hold the bread and, if possible, break it.

“...and said, ‘This is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.’”

THE CUP

Hold the cup. If you have not already, pour juice (or whatever you have on hand) into the cup.

“After supper, Jesus took the cup saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’”

PRAYER

Gracious and Loving God, You have made us for connection. In this time of separation and isolation send to us your Spirit. That we might experience your sustaining presence and be encouraged with hope through the fellowship of your love. Amen.

Receive and prayerfully enjoy the bread and the cup.

GENEROSITY

Prayerfully consider someone to reach out to with a word of love, encouragement, or prayer. Write a card. Make a phone call. Or identify a time to do so today (or in the week ahead).

Tithes and offerings can be mailed to South Elkhorn or you can give online at

southelkhorncc.org/give

CHANGING THE LIGHT

Now it is time to change the light. The light that was in one place at one time, is now in all places at all times.

In this very room and everywhere we go. And all God’s children said, Amen.

Extinguish the candle and watch the smoke rise.

UPDATES

Visit southelkhorncc.org/blog to learn the latest on worship, building usage, and more.

Digital Worship & Wonder videos available at southelkhorncc.org/worship-wonder.

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