

Dear People of God:

Blessed be God who forgives all our sins! Our help is in the Name of the Lord!

Lord Have Mercy

Christ Have Mercy

Lord Have Mercy

Before I offer my homily I want to say a couple things about today's service.

Thanks to Cathy who has sent out the service for all to adapt to their own settings as well as the lectionary which is lengthy but oh so important! I invite you to spend some time with it this week. I actually hope to record a service by next Sunday in some format to share with all of you. And that is inspired by the YouTube link I offer below which is our own Sherry Dwyer playing Abide with Me from her organ at home. Our mandatory shut down occurred before she had the opportunity to play our refurbished organ but she was not going to be daunted from sharing a beautiful meditation for all of us which will endure beyond these words. Thank you Sherry! Lyrics are printed after the link below.

Now to the sermon...

Blessed be God who animates our lives and again and again responds to our calls from the depths with new life, wondrous new life. AMEN

Let's take on the role of the psalmist this morning! Wait, what am I suggesting...We are the psalmist this morning!

I am not sure there has ever been a time when every single one of us could identify with the psalmist's cry from the depths. The psalms of lament, of which psalm 130 is one, offer a blessed poetic form which plead and pray to God, the God who hears us. That God will hear is the blessed assurance; That we are crying from the depths and must "wait" is our holy response and location.

Never before have we been cast into a wilderness quite like COVID19! Never before has this displacement of what we thought was normal not only coincided with the season of Lent but made Lent a reality, not a choice. We have been thrown knowingly or unknowingly into the abyss and called to wait and hope. And still we practice our faith, though differently motivated, by prayer and fasting, with a desperation rendering us like the lamenting psalmist.

At the core of the Biblical narrative is the story of exile or displacement or diaspora into which we have wandered or been subjugated and from which we long to return.

Whether that displacement is of body parts and bones as in Ezekiel's valley of dryness or whether it is the darkness of death into which Lazarus has descended, salvation history, redemption history, resurrection history, tells us there is more. There is rest and return. There is restoration and reconciliation. There is resurrection life!

Psalm 130 tells us the how and from whence of it: how we wait on the Lord; we cry from the depths. Of our souls, of our lives, of our faith. We are not good at waiting.

Waiting is hard enough in life as we knew it. Waiting is hard enough during the Lents gone by. Waiting in this imposed wilderness of coronavirus, which not coincidentally is superimposed on the 40 days of exile, is excruciating. Physical expressions of comfort and care have been thrown out the window...perhaps to lie in the valley of dry bones?! We certainly feel dry and disjointed if not discombobulated.

And yet we know somehow in our hearts that our waiting will be rewarded, though not necessarily in the way we expect or imagine. The emptiness we feel now will be rewarded with a fullness like no other. Our faith trains us to recognize that fullness. It comes as communion.

It is in times like these that we remember stories like that of the dry bones or Lazarus' raising and realize that we too are being breathed into with new life. We too call to Christ like Martha and Mary to heal our brothers and sisters. We too will be visited by a remarkable divine presence.

The Holy Spirit is near. Breathing the holy breath of patience and kindness into our frayed souls.

We are coming into resurrection life. We are traveling over uncharted territory and we are traveling with our true guide, the Risen Christ.

God is in the waiting
God is in the wilderness
God is in the darkness
God is in the hospitals and the clinics
God is in the grocery stores
God is with the homeless and addicted
God is with the lonely
God is even in the economy albeit pleading for a realization of God's economy, oikonomia, abundant and full.

God is the very undifferentiated grace which is invisible undefineable and absolutely everywhere.

We are in the midst of a holy pattern, an eternal one. Going out and coming in, like breathing, is the very basic rhythm of the Bible. It is the best we can do

to express God's presence and creative power. exile and return, sin and forgiveness, dirt and stardust into life forms, God breathes the Holy Spirit, God's very breath Ruach, into and through all creation. Unlike the virus droplets this is breath we cannot avoid even if we wanted to. We cannot wash our hands of the Spirit; no social distancing between and among our spiritual selves; God is at work in-spiring and creating the beloved community anyway!

And so in our isolations or sheltering in time, may we truly be with God. Pray to God, converse with God plead and surrender. May we offer up our grief and loss and wait like watchers in the night for the return of spiritual communion sustenance. May we be encouraged and enlivened like the bones, like Lazarus. May the Holy Spirit breathing in you be the Holy Spirit breathing in me. May we know the communion which realizes resurrection.

Let us pray:

In union, O Lord with the faithful at every altar of your Church, where the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, I desire to offer you praise and thanksgiving. I present to you my soul and body with the earnest wish that I may always be united to you. And since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, I ask you to come spiritually into my heart. I unite myself to you, and embrace you with all the affections of my soul. Let nothing ever separate you from me. May I live and die in your love. Amen.

Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak;
help the afflicted;
honour everyone;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

<https://youtu.be/u1zYnDc537c>

(copy and paste in browser)

1 Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.

2

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

3

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings;
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings:
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea;
Come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me.

4

I need Thy presence every passing hour:
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, oh, abide with me.

5

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless:
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness:
Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

*Please note I will begin an online Bible Study on the Gospel of John Tuesdays at 4 PM
Here is the Zoom information: Here is the link for the Tuesday Bible Study:*

<https://episcopalct.zoom.us/j/836528308>

The Meeting Room ID Number is: 836-528-308

And the call in information is: phone number: 646-558-8656 with the meeting ID 836 528 308

Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker

*"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God"
--Micah 6:8*

*"We seldom notice how each day is a holy place Where the eucharist of the ordinary happens,
Transforming our broken fragments Into an eternal continuity that keeps us."*

— John O'Donohue, To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Invocations and Blessings

I would love to live like a river flows, carried by the surprise of its own unfolding.

— John O'Donohue