



## ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### Worship in the household



While Jennifer and I were in Rome before the pandemic restrictions, we visited a number of churches named after women: Agnes, Cecilia, Prisca and the stunning 5<sup>th</sup> c. Basilica of St. Sabina with its shaved alabaster clerestory windows (at left, with our dear friend, Fr. Samuel).

What these house churches reveal is that women were leaders of worship in the early Christian households, something the historical Paul notes in his letter to Roman Christians: “I commend to

you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church ... Greet Prisca and Aquila and the church in their house” (Romans 16:1, 3, 5).

In today’s gospel reading, we encounter Martha and Mary and their brother, Lazareth. A number of contemporary scholars suggest that these particular two women were leaders in household communities of the first Christians. Even today, denominations continue to deny positions of leadership to women despite ample evidence of the opposite practice in the early Christian tradition.

### Preparation

You might find a stone to put on the table in preparation for worship this morning and light a candle for prayer as a visual reminder that as the gravestone is rolled away, Lazarus was raised from the “night” of the cave into the light and life of day. If you are worshipping by yourself, keep in mind that our worship is always voiced in the plural – “we,” “us” and “our” because you are still an essential part of a church community at prayer. The worship of God and service to others binds us together.

**The Fifth Sunday in Lent  
29 March 2020**



**Centering**

*Make the sign of the cross and say:* Blessed be (+) God who, on the first day, began creating, bringing light out of darkness and life out of death.

*Pray the Decalogue aloud:* Hear the commandments of God to God's people: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage. You shall have no other gods but me.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

Honor your father and your mother.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

You shall not commit murder.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

You shall not commit adultery.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

You shall not steal.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

You shall not be a false witness.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

*Amen. Lord have mercy.*

*Silence and stillness*

*After a moment, the leader says:* Let us confess our sins against God and neighbor

*All pray together:* Almighty God, our heavenly Father:

We have sinned against you,  
through our own fault,

in thought, and word, and deed,  
and in what we have left undone.

For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,

forgive us all our offenses;

and grant that we may serve you

in newness of life,

to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

*All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:*

May the Almighty God grant us forgiveness of all our sins,

and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

*All pray together:* Holy God,

Holy and Mighty,

Holy Immortal One,

Have mercy upon us.

## **The Word of God for the Fifth Sunday in Lent**

*The Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read. The Gospel follows after a reading from Hebrew Scripture, a Psalm and a reading from the early church, should you choose to read all the texts for the day.*

A reading from Ezekiel: The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O LORD God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the LORD God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the LORD God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the LORD God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the Lord.

*Reader:* The Word of the LORD

*Response:* Thanks be to God

Psalm 130 *De profundis*

- <sup>1</sup> Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice; \*  
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.
- <sup>2</sup> If you, LORD, were to note what is done amiss, \*  
O LORD, who could stand?
- <sup>3</sup> For there is forgiveness with you; \*  
therefore you shall be feared.
- <sup>4</sup> I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; \*  
in his word is my hope.
- <sup>5</sup> My soul waits for the LORD, more than watchmen for the morning, \*  
more than watchmen for the morning.
- <sup>6</sup> O Israel, wait for the LORD, \*  
for with the LORD there is mercy;
- <sup>7</sup> With him there is plenteous redemption, \*  
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

A reading from 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.

*Reader:* The Word of the Lord

*Response:* Thanks be to God

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. John: 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.”

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

### **Sermon:**

I stepped out of my car in the parking lot of the Central Market feeling very disoriented. Going to the grocery store is something I used to do about three times a week. But for three weeks before this errand, I had been either away in Italy or sequestered in my house.

Jennifer and I took the self-quarantine very seriously, despite having no symptoms. We mostly just *really* did not want to pass anything along. And so, I never left the house except to get the mail across the street and then only when I was certain no one was around.

Three weeks later, there I was in a combination of the most mundane and yet unfamiliar situation wondering if this might be a minor version of the strangeness that Lazarus must have felt. I could suddenly imagine him stepping out into the light, still bandaged, blinking and wondering what would happen next.

In the early church and for centuries, this Sunday was the last time that the church gathered to instruct those who were to be baptized at the Great Pascha Vigil. And so, these readings address the gift that would come to them in that ritual sacrament.

There is a reference in the reading from Ezekiel that also shows up in St. Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. YHWH says to the children of Israel through the prophet, “I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live...” The word *ruach* in Hebrew means both spirit and breath.

St. Paul reminds the Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome that “...you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.” And the Greek word that Paul used, *pneuma*, serves the same double meaning: spirit and breath.

YHWH is asking the prophet to “inspire,” to breathe the breath of Adonai, the living God, into a field of dead, dry bones. And they will be given not simply animation, but the life of the Holy One. In his letter, Paul is reminding other children of God that this same spirit was breathed into them at their baptisms.

In the act of creating people YHWH breathes life, God’s very own spirit, into earthly matter. We get the story from the book of Genesis of the *adama*, the “mud-creature” or “earthling” that God creates. And all of us “mud-creatures” are physically mostly water, oxygen, carbon, and a handful of other minerals and chemicals, along with a great deal of empty space. And yet, we are much more than what a friend of mine calls “frisky dirt.” So much more!

God “inspires,” that is to say, breathes into each of us “earthlings” the gift of life. At our baptisms, our own physical bodies become baptismal fonts – sacred fountains flowing with the life-giving Spirit of God breathing in us for each other.

The readings from Ezekiel and Romans, and especially from John all emphasize the significance of embodiment as the essence of life as God’s “mud-creatures.” All three

readings convey the crucial need for the integration of our physical reality with our spiritual reality.

Many Orthodox see Jesus demonstrating this integration in his act of resurrecting Lazarus. They see his question: "Where have you laid him?" and his genuine grief as evidence of his physical, human nature. And as evidence of his spiritual, divine nature, they see the foretelling of his friend's death and the command for Lazarus to come out of the tomb four days after his death.

We too easily split off and reduce the value of foundational aspects of ourselves. If we disapprove of the human body, we miss the lesson of Ezekiel. If we rely entirely on our physical reality, we miss the point of Paul's letter. God creates humanity as embodied spirit and, in the book of Genesis, calls it not just good, but *very* good.

Learning to integrate the Divine as a central element of our embodied being is how we to live as whole, as holy – to start living resurrection lives right now. John's Gospel story intentionally foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus. And without Ezekiel and Paul's reminders, we might miss or misunderstand a key moment: "I *am* (present tense) the resurrection and the life."

Resurrection, do you see, is not a future event only or a one-time miracle reserved only for Jesus. Resurrection is a quality of existence that has already begun and that will come to fruition in God's own time.

Last week, I told you that "*adama*" is not a man's name, but a description. In the first creation story, YHWH makes humanity, *adama*, in God's own image and likeness. In the second creation story, YHWH creates a human and then, recognizing that it is not good for the human to be alone, creates a partner. We call her Eve, but in the Greek used by Jewish scribes, her name is Ζωή, which means "life," both physical life in the present and spiritual, especially in future existence.

What John's Jesus shows us is that human life is not simply "frisky dirt" and that eternal life is not simply waiting in the future. Resurrection life is earthly, embodied Spirit that radiates love, light and grace into communities. We can experience eternal life now.

I can't know what Lazarus felt when he walked out of that tomb into a new reality. But standing in the parking lot of the grocery store, I could feel that the world around me had changed. I know this is temporary, but just for a second, it didn't feel that way.

What I felt was sad for all those who had lost loved ones or jobs. I felt grateful, and noticed even a little guilt, because my wife and daughters and the rest of my family are fine. I felt mildly irritated that people who didn't bother with flu shots were now hoarding flour, toilet paper and medical masks that other people needed.

And I felt a wisp, just a mere kiss, of joy.

We could conceivably actually manage to come out of this together if we let compassion thrive in us. We – you and I – may start really seeing the divine presence in others, even in those who seem hell-bent on making us nuts.

The way to welcome that yearning to blossom into our current situation is to seek and trust the loving breath of God at the center of our own being. To contemplate it like Mary did. Mary knew that God would never let go of her brother. And Jesus knew that God always hears.

And to engage the loving breath of God in our earthly lives like Martha did. Martha knew that sickness and suffering and the stench of death are all very real. And Jesus wept.

There is a gentle robustness in the intermingling of these two women that wants to be an inspiring and grounded hope for us.

And he called to Lazarus as he calls to each of us: “Come out and be unbound.”

*Silence and stillness*

### **Prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need**

*These intercessions may be used, adding others in each household:*

*Leader:* God the Father, your will for all people is health and salvation.

*All:* We praise and bless you, LORD.

*Leader:* God the Son, you came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly.

*All:* We praise and bless you, LORD.

*Leader:* God the Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence.

*All:* We praise and bless you, LORD.

*Leader:* Holy Trinity, one God, in you we live and move and have our being.

*All:* We praise and bless you, LORD.

*Leader:* In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the Anglican Church in Nigerian and South Sudan, the Right Reverend Paul Mbamili (Nigeria), the Right Reverend Henry Okeke Wau and the Most Reverend Moses Deng Bol Ibba (South Sudan)

In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for Good Samaritan, Sammamish; St. Clare, Snoqualmie.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* We pray for our neighbors at Navos, for Neighborhood House, for Hospitality House, for Operation Nightwatch, for the safety of those in military service and for the safety and stamina of healthcare workers and other first responders and for their families. We pray for those on our long-term list. Let us pray for our own needs and those of others. *(please add the names of those on your heart and mind):*

*Leader:* Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured or disabled, that they may be made whole.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* Grant to all who are lonely, anxious or depressed, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* Grant to all who minister to those who are suffering wisdom and skill, sympathy and patience.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* Mend broken relationships, and restore to those in distress soundness of mind and serenity of spirit.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* Sustain and support those who seek your guidance and lift up all who are brought low by the trials of this life.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* Grant to the dying peace and a holy death, and uphold by the grace and consolation of your Holy Spirit those who are bereaved.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world.

*All:* Hear us, LORD of life.

*Leader:* You are the LORD who does mighty wonders.

*All:* You have declared your power among the peoples.

*Leader:* With you, LORD, is the well of life

*All:* and in your light do we see light.

*Leader:* Hear us, LORD of life:

*All:* heal us, and make us whole.

Let us pray.

*A period of silence follows, and then:*

*Leader:* Hear the prayer we offer for all your people. Remember in your mercy those for whom we pray: heal the sick, raise the fallen, strengthen the fainthearted and enfold in your love the fearful and those who have no hope.

In the fullness of time complete your gracious work. Reconcile all things in Christ and make them new, that we may be restored in your image, renewed in your love, and serve you as sons and daughters in your kingdom.

Through your anointed Son, Jesus Christ, our LORD, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit we lift our voices of thanks and praise:

*All:* Blessed be God, our strength and our salvation, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **Pater Noster/Our Father/The Lord's Prayer**

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 trespasses,  
    as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
    but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Prayer of spiritual communion**

Most Holy Christ, we trust that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. We love you above all things, and we long for you in our souls. Since we cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into our hearts. We embrace you as though you were already there and we unite ourselves entirely to you. Never permit us to be separated from you. *Amen.*

### **Concluding Prayer**

Almighty God,  
your Son came into the world  
to free us from sin and death.  
Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit,  
that we may be strengthened in our life with Christ  
and serve your people in holiness and righteousness all our days.  
We ask through our Lord, Jesus Christ,  
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,  
now and forever. Amen.

### **Blessing**

*Make the sign of the cross as you say:*

May the (+) God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, make us complete in every good thing so that we may do God's will. Amen.  
Let us go forth into this day in the Peace of Christ. Amen.

## **Giving Thanks at Table**

*The practice of giving thanks to God over food and drink at table marked the practice of Jesus and his followers. You are welcome to use this thanksgiving whenever you are at table for a meal.*

All eyes look to you, O God,  
And you give them their food in due season.  
You open wide your hand and feed every living thing.  
Gracious God,  
We give you thanks for this food and drink,  
Signs of your steadfast care for all creation:  
Open our ears to hear those who cry for daily bread  
And so move our hearts and minds  
That we might labor for a just sharing of your many gifts.  
We ask this in the name of you son, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, forever and ever. Amen.

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