**Sunday 29th March**

**Lent 5 – Passion Sunday**

**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

**Reading:**

**John 11:1-45**

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 for 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 for 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.

**Making Meaning:**

Today marks the beginning of Passiontide, and an intentional steer towards the annual remembrance of the suffering of Christ; *passio* means suffering. Prior to his own suffering, Jesus is deeply involved in the suffering of a family of close friends: two sisters whose brother died. In Christ we see that God participates in suffering and is not impassable. This story prefigures God’s ultimate answer to suffering: Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. It is sometimes said that this miracle was the ‘last straw’ for the Jewish authorities concerning Jesus; it was this that made them all the more determined to kill Jesus.

The theme of suffering is in the forefront of all our minds at the moment in the face of the pandemic lock-down, but Christians have a quiet assurance that God is not above suffering, and the glorious answer that we await each Easter.

**Prayers:**

We remember all those who suffer, either medically or economically, because of Coronavirus.

We seek God’s sustaining power and priority for the poor for all involved in the Government’s response.

We give thanks for the work of the military and the quick completion of Nightingale Hospital at EXCEL.

We give thanks for a generous voluntary response from retired medical workers and the general public.

We mourn the loss of Valerie Pope of Roughway who died on 17th March… praying for Robert and the family.

We mourn the loss of Rev Michael Hobbs to be buried in Plaxtol on Wednesday… remembering Ellie & the family.

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Soften my heart, Lord, soften my heart.

From all indifference set me apart

To feel your compassion, to weep with your tears

Come soften my heart, oh Lord, soften my heart.

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There’s a wideness in God’s mercy

Like the wideness of the sea

There’s a kindness in his justice

Which is more than liberty

There is no place where earth’s sorrows

Are more felt than up in heaven;

There is no place where earth’s failings

Have such kindly judgement given

For the love of God is broader

Than the measure of man’s mind

And the heart of the Eternal

Is most wonderfully kind.

**Blessing:**

Christ crucified draw you to himself,

To find in him a sure ground for faith,

A firm support for hope,

And the assurance of sins forgiven;

And the blessing of God Almighty,

The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit,

Beyond up you and remain with you this day

And throughout this season of Passiontide and lock-down.

**Amen.**