

Drouin Uniting Church : March 29th. 2020.

Call to worship.

We celebrate worship in our own homes for the time being. As we are used to gathering together for worship this present arrangement may seem rather strange to us. However we can still have a sense of connectedness as we remember one another and remember that we are part of a Christian church throughout Australia and the world. The story of the Christian church reminds us that, in earlier times, the church knows a great deal about not being able to gather together week by week.

Light a Lenten candle to carefully place on your small coffee table.

A starting prayer. [If you're on your own you might like to say this out loud or if there's more than one person in your house you might like to say this together].

Gracious God, as members of the Drouin congregation we miss each other's physical presence to pray together, to sing hymns together, to listen to the Scriptures together. So help us to listen to each other in a new way, naming our brothers and sisters in our hearts & trying to imagine their homes and their circumstances. Amen

TiS 667 How shall I sing to God

How shall I sing to God when life is filled with gladness,
loving and birth, wonder and worth?
I'll sing from the heart, thankfully receiving,
joyful in believing.

This is my song, I'll sing it with love.

How shall I sing to God when life is filled with bleakness,
empty and chill, breaking my will?
I'll sing through my pain, angrily or aching,
crying or complaining.

This is my song, I'll sing it with love.

How shall I sing to God and tell my Saviour's story:
Passover bread, life from the dead?
I'll sing with my life, witnessing and giving,
risking and forgiving.

This is my song, I'll sing it with love.

Brian Arthur Wren

Prayer:

Loving, merciful and compassionate God
in faith, in hope and in trust, we look for you.
You created all people that they might turn to you in joy and in sorrow. At
this time our focus tends to be drawn away from you
because we are overwhelmed by tears, by sorrows, by misgivings.
It is understandable that we are consumed by tragedy, by illness and the
threat of illness.

In this time of distress, grief and torment
may we be reminded of your act of self-giving in the whole event of Jesus'
life, his ministry of healing, sacrifice and renewal,
and take from such reminding the strength and resourcefulness
to face our own lives with quiet courage.

Holy God, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Scripture: **Ezekiel 37:1-14** Ezekiel and the bones!
 Psalms 130 Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord
 John 11:1-45 Healing of Lazarus

Sermon

The texts for today make the contrasts between life and death and they point
toward Easter. But each of them focus more on the life of the people of God
on this side of the grave than on the resurrection.

The lesson from Ezekiel addresses a bleak time. The people of God

whom Ezekiel addresses are in the grip of uncertainty; they are in exile. In the short term there's not much to look forward to & hope & optimism are in short supply. But Ezekiel suggests that, though now dead in exile, the people will yet know what it is to live in their land.

The psalm is the cry of an individual – it's a cry of complaint, and at the same time it's a prayer, it's a howl, it's a lament. It's asking that God who knows all about 'steadfast love' will actively help the person in trouble.

And John's gospel tells the dramatic story of the raising of Lazarus.

As we hear almost 24/7 a whole lot of people are worried not only about the corona virus but, as consequence of its widespread implications, about their livelihoods as well. Where's their money going to come from ,,, and when? And who can meet with whom? And who can travel? And who can get home from overseas? And how? Who can care for the children when the parents who have work, go to work?

All these and many many more are pressing questions arising out of real concerns, real troubles.

So in these perilous communal and personal times what are we able to glean from the Bible readings. I think that Ezekiel and the Psalmist and St John would offer us a quiet confidence. They would say something like 'hold on to your faith in God **even** in the most difficult times. Perhaps **especially** in the most difficult times'.

If you can do this then you'll find that your faith and God's faithfulness can work together to help and sustain you.

We're still in the season of Lent [sometimes we call today **Passion Sunday** when we really zero in on the impending passion of Christ]. And today was to have been our Mission service. Perhaps one of our mission aims just now could and can be to uphold each other, our communities and the world's nations in prayer as well as in whatever practical ways are open to us.

God is with us, we are not alone.

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Offering [Maybe you could place a little bowl where you could put your offering ready to bring to church when normal services resume].

Offering Dedication.

Self-giving God I/we set aside our offering placed here or made by Electronic Funds Transfer for the work of our congregation, the wider church and our service in the wider world. We offer our gifts with joyful hearts.

Prayers of Intercession.

Gracious God, We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.
We pray for those in need of healing.

We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.

We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain all those who are serving in response and in medical research.

We pray for the people who have lost a family member to the virus.

We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment amidst the many choices and decisions facing our national, community and medical leaders.

We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do to help those who are vulnerable.

This prayer for our nation in the family of nations, with all that is on our hearts, we gather now and pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

The Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, / hallowed be your name
your kingdom come, / your will be done / on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread,

Forgive us our sins / as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial / and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen

Hymn TiS 682 When human voices cannot sing.

When human voices cannot sing / and human hearts are breaking,
we bring our grief to you, O God / who knows our inner aching.

Set free our spirits from all fear – / the cloud of dark unknowing,
and let the light, the Christ light show / the pathway of our going.

Make real for us your holding love, / the love which is your meaning,
the power to move the stone of death, / the hope of Easter morning.

And let the one we love now go / where we, in faith, shall follow,
to travel in the Spirit's peace, / to make an end to sorrow.

Shirley Erena Murray

Blessing In the present time, now as always, the peace of the Lord is with us.
Thanks be to God.

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