

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, March 29, 2020
Fifth Sunday in Lent
Rev. Mark McLennan

THIS STINKS!!

Scriptures:

Ezekiel 37:1-14 – The Valley of Dry Bones

Psalm 130 – My soul waits for the Lord

John 11:1-45 – The raising of Lazarus

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So...

We can't shop for fun. We can't meet for drinks. We can't go out for dinner. We can't go to the gym. We can't have a kiss or a hug. We can't go to church. No hand sanitizer. No wet wipes. No toilet paper.

This stinks!!

Thousands of people are sick in our country. Two dozen have died already. More will get sick and die in the days and weeks ahead. That is so much more significant than our inconveniences.

John's Gospel relates a story that is a turning point in Jesus' life, in chapter 11. He knew this family – Mary, Martha, Lazarus – he had visited them before. Now – they have experienced a tragedy – Lazarus is dead.

But Jesus shows up four days later, and Martha wasn't too happy about it. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary said the same thing a little later. Martha was upset, Mary was upset.

JESUS WAS UPSET

- verse 35 – "Jesus wept" – [shortest verse in Scripture]

Observers said, "See how he loved him." Here is Jesus, the Son of Man, in a profoundly human moment in his life.

He goes to the tomb, Martha cautions him: "Lord, already there is a stench" King James version "He stinketh."

Jesus prays to his Father in heaven, then shouts "Lazarus, come out!!" Lazarus got up and walked out of his tomb.

Now, that's a miracle!!

It could be said, we are looking for miracles - **now**.

Test kits, medical supplies, respirators, hospital beds, more medical help Financial support, common sense.

We need them – **now**.

We know what Jesus did for Lazarus.

What shall we do **now**? So much uncertainty, confusion, fear, and even anger.

There are lots of little miracles out there already – people helping people.

We have all seen, heard, and read stories of selfless service, courage, and personal sacrifice.

Front line medical workers of all sorts, factory workers, truckers and countless others are doing their jobs diligently, regardless of the risk to their personal safety.

Entertainers, artists, actors and singers are also providing welcome relief for those confined to hospitals, resident facilities or their own home.

Dave Gunning – a singer/songwriter from Pictou, Nova Scotia, posted a video this week, recorded in his own home.

I have known Dave for years, and he presented a wonderful concert at Knox, Woodstock in 2016.

In this video, Dave presented what I think is his best song. It is called “THESE HANDS” - released in 2012. I invite you to read the song here or listen to it on You Tube.

The words are particularly thought-provoking in these days:

Some hands have held the world together
Some hands have fought in wars forever
Tell me what shall I do with these hands of mine
Some hands have blessed a million people
Some hands helped free the world from evil
Tell me what shall I do with these hands of mine

What shall I do with these hands of mine
What shall I do with these hands of mine
The world could use a hero of the humankind
So, tell me what shall I do with these hands of mine

Some hands can stop a life from dying
Some hands comfort a baby crying
So, tell me what shall I do with these hands of mine

I want to sing it from my heart, I want to hear it in the wind 'Til it blows around the world, and comes back again
All that we can ask, is for ours to be free
To use them when we want, for whatever the need

Some hands give voice to a nation
Some hands wrote "The Times They Are a-Changin'"
So, tell me what shall I do with these hands of mine

What shall I do with these hands of mine
What shall I do with these hands of mine
The world could use a hero of the humankind
So, tell me what shall I do with these hands of mine

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So, tell me what shall I do with these hands of mine? What shall you do with your hands?

Start by washing them!!!

Of course, we can't replicate what Jesus did that day at Bethany.

But there are new and exciting opportunities for our hands in these days:

- Using a telephone, a computer keyboard, or a pen – you know what to do.
- Clapping them in prayer – you know what to do.
- Preparing a meal – you know what to do.

That's a short list, but you can think of others.

Your hands can be important and useful in these days.

Perhaps it is fortuitous that this is happening during Lent; it will clearly have an ongoing impact on our lives well past Holy Week, Pentecost, and beyond.

We are still on the road to Calvary, like we are every year.

I think the trip is different this year; perhaps like in the war years, as some have suggested.

I read a helpful statement earlier this week, that gave me perspective:

THE REV. DR. WILEY STEPHENS:

We stand at this point on the road to Easter and we know that--

The world will not have the last word.

We will not have the last word.

But God will have the last word.

These are days of new beginnings.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST OUR LORD, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT...AMEN

John 11:1-45

This story about Lazarus shares much in common with that of the Samaritan woman at the well. With the Samaritan woman the issue was seeing Jesus as the source of living water as compared to ordinary water.

Here the issue is to see Jesus as the source of living life as compared to ordinary life."

STEWARDSHIP QUOTE

The best investment with the least risk and the greatest dividend is giving.

John Templeton (1912 – 2008), American-British investor, philanthropist

Prayer of Approach

Holy One,

We cannot gather in person this morning, but we are gathered in spirit.

We come together in our uncertainty and our fear.

We come together in our determination and our hope.

We come together to worship you:

Our Creator and Sustainer,

The One who provides water from a rock

To quench our parched throats,

And living water from Jesus

To restore our weary spirits.

Let us know your presence with us

And our presence with each other In this time of worship.

Heavenly Father, we confess to you our fears, our worries, and our anxieties. You have given us your perfect love which casts out all fear and your peace which transcends all understanding, but even still we feel dislodged, displaced, untethered, and uncertain during these times.

We believe, Lord; help our unbelief.

Lord, have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

O God, make speed to save us. O Lord, make haste to help us.

We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus, who taught us to prayer together...OUR FATHER...Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession from The Rev. Porter C. Taylor, 2020

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. We pray today,

For a swift end to COVID-19.

For those infected and those who have been exposed; grant them strength, healing, and protection.

For their loved ones and caretakers; grant them peace, comfort, and endurance.

For those leading nations; grant them sound minds, courage, and humility.

For physicians, nurses, technicians, researchers, administrators, and all other healthcare employees around the world; grant them strength by your life-giving Spirit, wisdom, and resources to do the work before them.

For those who must work, despite the threat of sickness; grant them protection and continued provision.

For those who have become unemployed or underemployed during this pandemic; grant them comfort, wisdom, and financial provision.

For churches and their clergy; grant them discernment and creativity to lead and minister in unprecedented circumstances.

For parents and families; grant them wisdom, patience and joy.

For children; grant them protection from fear.

For those for whom home is not a safe haven; grant them refuge.

For those who are alone; grant them a sense of your nearness and love.

For all navigating decisions during this time of uncertainty and fear; grant them your peace.

O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live; grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil;

In the name of the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit...AMEN

BENEDICTION

God go before you to lead you,

God go behind you to protect you,

God go beneath you to support you,

God go beside you to befriend you.

Do not be afraid.

May the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you.

Do not be afraid.

Be at peace as you love and serve the Lord. Amen.