Good morning. My name is the Rev. Stephen Ayres, and I am the priest at Christ Episcopal Church in Aspen, Colorado. Thank you for tuning in. I hope this meditation will bring you comfort during this period of social isolation.

During this period of mandatory church closure, Christ Church will be live streaming two programs each Sunday. This 8:00 service includes the gospel, a meditation, and a few prayers and is streamed via Facebook Live. For those without Facebook, the same service will be posted on christchurchaspen.org on the Service and Sermons page.

For the past two weeks, I have had the pleasure of streaming a service of Morning Prayer with the Rev. Wendy Huber of St. Peter’s, Basalt from the Aspen Chapel at 11:00 am. I am grateful that St. Peter’s and Aspen Chapel enabled this collaboration. New stay at home directives from Pitkin County and from the state no longer allow the live streaming of services, due to the number of people involved.

This abbreviated service of Morning Prayer begins on page 78 of the Book of Common Prayer. You can find our prayer book online at BCPONLINE.ORG.

Rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord   
your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and   
abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Most merciful God,   
we confess that we have sinned against you   
in thought, word, and deed,   
by what we have done,   
and by what we have left undone.   
We have not loved you with our whole heart;   
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.   
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.   
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,   
have mercy on us and forgive us;   
that we may delight in your will,   
and walk in your ways,   
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins   
through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all   
goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in   
eternal life. *Amen.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Officiant* | Lord, open our lips. |
| *People* | And our mouth shall proclaim your praise. |

*Officiant and People*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as   
it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

**Venite**     *Psalm 95:1-7*

Come, let us sing to the Lord; \*   
    let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.   
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving \*   
    and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God, \*   
    and a great King above all gods.   
In his hand are the caverns of the earth, \*   
    and the heights of the hills are his also.   
The sea is his, for he made it, \*   
    and his hands have molded the dry land.

Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, \*   
    and kneel before the Lord our Maker.   
For he is our God,   
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. \*  
    Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

### Psalm 130

***De profundis***

1 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.

2 If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, \*  
O Lord, who could stand?

3 For there is forgiveness with you; \*  
therefore you shall be feared.

4 I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; \*  
in his word is my hope.

5 My soul waits for the Lord,  
more than watchmen for the morning, \*  
more than watchmen for the morning.

6 O Israel, wait for the Lord, \*  
for with the Lord there is mercy;

7 With him there is plenteous redemption, \*  
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

### A reading from the Epistle to the 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.

A reading from the Gospel of John

11Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4But 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.” 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” 8The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?”9Jesus 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. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” 11After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” 12The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” 28When 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.”29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31The 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.32When 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.”

33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus 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.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I 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.” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The 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.”

45Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Homily

This is a long gospel, but it’s the shortest verse that caught my attention. ”Jesus wept.” You see, I became quite weepy earlier this week. I had worked Monday afternoon on a fairly upbeat newsletter article and report for the Wednesday vestry meeting. I was grateful that Warren and Chris Klug had arranged for a videographer to begin filming our Sunday services from the Christ Church sanctuary. The Monday night, Pitkin County issued a new more restrictive stay in place order, which appeared to prohibit our use of the church for any purpose. (Warren later spoke with Pitkin County Health and confirmed that that was the case.)

As I was rewriting the newsletter article and report to the vestry Tuesday morning, staff from the Old North Foundation, my place of work and passion for the last twenty two years contacted me for ideas of people to contact for emergency support to keep the foundation afloat. The had to close their doors to the public and postpone their biggest fund raiser of the year, the Annual Lantern Ceremony, held on Patriot’s Day Weekend in April.

After wrapping up the newsletter, after sending several contact names to Old North, after conferring with my wife back in Boston about how much we might donate to Old North, I went for a walk. That’s when I got weepy.

In good Episcopal stiff upper lip tradition, I have tried to remain stoic throughout the unfolding pandemic. Clergy are taught to be the non-anxious presence in times of stress, but the stresses keep piling up. It won’t be safe to worship on Easter at Christ Church either electronically or in person. The great staff I left behind at the Old North Foundation was facing imminent economic peril. My family is two thousand miles away, also forced to stay at home as the pandemic rages through Boston.

Walking through Meadowood, looking around at the gorgeous scenery only exacerbated my melancholy. There is a great view of Aspen Highlands and Buttermilk from the field below our house. The snow covered slopes lay empty, save for a couple solitary skiers skinning up the mountains. So much for my plans to ski bum into retirement. So much for any future plans, as we have no idea how the world will change once we defeat Covid.

My guess is that most of us have found the need to weep, or at least tear up a bit, in the last week. Many of you know persons who have been diagnosed with Covid or are self quarantined with symptoms. Many of you are small business owners or know small business owners who are struggling to survive and care for their employees in the absence of any significant income. As we read about the growing number of deaths, I suspect most of us are paraphrasing the question that Mary and Martha asked Jesus, “Lord, if we had only done something sooner, more people might still be alive.”

Jesus wept when he saw Mary weeping over her brother Lazarus, and Jesus is weeping with us as we mourn the destruction caused by the coronavirus on our community, our nation and the world. Jesus wept, in spite of knowing that Lazarus’ death would come to a surprising, life affirming conclusion. He felt the pain of Mary, Martha and the mourners in their moment of grief.

Jesus may have also wept for himself, knowing that this, his seventh and last great miracle in the Gospel of John, would be the one that would lead His enemies to plot His death. His disciples had warned him not to return to Judea from their relative safety east of the Jordan River. They had just been in Jerusalem to celebrate Hanukah and the crowds had nearly stoned Jesus to death. The disciples plead with Jesus not to go to Bethany, a town adjacent to Jerusalem. The disciples, wrong in their understanding of the cosmic course of events, were correct in their earthly assessment of the trip to Bethany. It did directly lead to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion.

Because Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, he had to return to Bethany. He wept with the sisters because He loved them. He waited until Lazarus was dead for four days because He loves us. Four days signified that Lazarus was dead, really dead, and beyond hope for mere resuscitation.

Because Jesus loved Lazarus, he gave Lazarus true life, not just the four score year and ten promised in the bible, but saved life, as in “I am the resurrection and I am the life.” The love of Jesus for humanity is life. God’s love is the kind of life that triumphs over death.

As devastating as this pandemic is, we keep hearing stories of God’s love being manifested in our midst. Stories of brave doctors and nurses healing the diseased, despite a lack of medical equipment. Doctors and nurses are risking their lives, and in too many cases have sacrificed their lives, so that we might live. Did you see the touching story last week of the elderly Italian priest, who gave the respirator his parish had bought him to a younger man to save the younger man’s life.

The love that each one of you is showing, by staying at home, by calling on your older friends, by donating to food pantries, by supporting non-profits and small businesses, by giving up worshipping in your beautiful sanctuary, all these little sacrifices add up to a significant sacrifice for the sake of humanity.

These sacrifices, even the little ones are not easy and they may cause us to weep for what we are losing as we weep for the lives that are being lost around the world. For those of you who believe our nation needs patriotic symbols like the Old North Church, I urge you to send a donation. For those of you who love the community gathered at Christ Church, Aspen, I urge you to send a donation. For those of you who care for those who may fall through the cracks, I urge you to support your local food pantry. For all of us, may we stay home and wash our hands often. May all our sacrifices help bring new life and new hope to our communities.

Jesus wept, a sign of how much he loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus and a sign of how much he loves us. Grieving is necessary for our spiritual and mental health. May you find the time to weep the holy and loving tears that Jesus wept. May you in those tears find the love of God that transcends death, a love that gives us the strength to sacrifice of ourselves as Jesus sacrificed himself for us, a love that promises eternal life to all who believe and follow Jesus. Amen.

Let us say together the Apostles Creed p96 BCP

I believe in God, the Father almighty,   
    creator of heaven and earth;   
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.   
    He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit   
        and born of the Virgin Mary.   
    He suffered under Pontius Pilate,   
        was crucified, died, and was buried.   
    He descended to the dead.   
    On the third day he rose again.   
    He ascended into heaven,   
        and is seated at the right hand of the Father.   
    He will come again to judge the living and the dead.   
I believe in the Holy Spirit,   
    the holy catholic Church,   
    the communion of saints,   
    the forgiveness of sins  
    the resurrection of the body,   
    and the life everlasting. Amen.

Let us pray

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,   
     and the power, and the glory,   
     for ever and ever. Amen.

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of   
the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this   
day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week   
to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our   
Lord. *Amen.*

Prayer list Names:

CEC MEMBERS

Bob & Marsha

George

Margo & Keith

Veronica

BobbiAnn

John

Kim

Tom

Bob

All Those Serving Their Country

The young people and students of Aspen

FRIENDS & FAMILY OF CEC MEMBERS

The Family and friends of Beverly Forsmann

Noel

Susan & Mickey

Petra

Harrison

Charlie

Elizabeth

Beverly

Jocelyn

Henry

Annie

Otto

For the doctors, nurses and first responders in the Roaring Fork Valley and throughout the world, as they combat the coronavirus pandemic and for all those who are suffering with the coronavirus.

For Pauli Laukkanen and for the thousands of souls who have died from the coronavirus around the world this week.

LET US PRAY FOR OUR CHRIST CHURCH RECTOR SEARCH EFFORTS

Father, we thank you for loving us and living through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you. At this time of transition for Christ Church and our search for a new Rector, we ask for your help in discerning your will in making decisions to strengthen and grow our church to your glory. Help us to be attentive to one another, respecting our individual desires for our church so that we may become unified in our mission. We pray for your guidance as we seek the leader who can help us to become the Christian community we aspire to be. We offer this prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the   
earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those   
who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people   
everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the   
nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh;   
and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus   
Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one   
accord to make our common supplication to you; and you   
have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two   
or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the   
midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions   
as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of   
your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

*Then may be said*

Let us bless the Lord.   
*Thanks be to God.*

Thank you for joining with members of Christ Church, Aspen in this moment of prayer and reflection. Please like, share, or forward this web cast. If you would like to support Christ Church’s ministry, you can find a donate button on christchurchaspen.org. Have a blessed week. I look forward to celebrating Palm Sunday with you next weekend.