

BECKENHAM METHODIST CHURCH

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Service: 29 March 2020

Rev. Jannet Mudavanhu

"Don't Give Up Hope"

GATHERING

5th Sunday in Lent

4th Day in Lockdown

1 week to Palm Sunday

It is eery, it is dark, it is quiet. *(pause)*

We pause; and thank you Lord, for this day.

For the challenges, for the emotions and the struggles

For all this, we grow closer to you. *(pause)*

We pause; and we ask that in this our darkness, we see light

And in our fear, we draw strength from your presence. *(pause)*

We pause, and remember that, today, as the days before, we have survived; when we have wanted to run, we stayed;

When we wanted to hide, we faced the day. *(pause)*

We pause, surrounded by your Spirit. *(pause)*

We pause and resting in you. *(pause)*.

Kumbaya, my Lord, Kumbaya.

Lord, come by here.

SONG

KUMBAYA MY LORD (Lord come Here)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYJMtn6IJeE>

(We remain seated as we meditatively sing)

Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya

Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya

Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya

O Lord, kumbaya x2

Someone is praying Lord, kumbaya x3
O Lord, kumbaya x2

Someone is crying Lord, kumbaya x3
O Lord, kumbaya x2

Someone is singing Lord, kumbaya x3
O Lord, kumbaya x2

Kumbaya my Lord kumbaya
O Lord, kumbaya x2

PRAYER TIME (*Adapted from Prayers by Michael Graham*)

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors; remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home; remember those who must choose, between preserving their health and making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close; remember those who have no options.

May we who have cancel our trips; remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we, who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market; remember those who have no margins at all.

May we, who settle in for quarantine at home remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country, let us choose to love.

And during this time, when we may not be able to physically wrap our arms around each other, let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbour.

Father, we seek your wisdom daily, wisdom for those making decisions that affect the lives and future of our families, our communities, our countries and our world.

Inspire those who are developing better tests to diagnose the virus, vaccines to prevent it.

Instil in us the spirit to comply with measures put in place by our governments to protect us.

We also pray for all members of our church family – Beckenham Methodist Church who are not feeling well, may they be comforted by your loving presence.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer. Amen

BIBLE READING – *John 11: 1- 45*

(Audio Bible) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJRtwWNSpY4>

HYMN (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bWjb_6MzwY)

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

*On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand*

When darkness seems to veil His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

Refrain

When he shall come with trumpet's sound,
O may I then in him be found.
Clothed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before his throne.

(Words by Edward Mote (1797-1874))

REFLECTION

THEME: *Don't Give Up Hope*

At one point or another most of us have experienced unprecedented challenges. Some of those challenges threatened even to break the best of relationships and friendships. The most likely attitude we assume when we feel let down, is to cut-off that relationship or friendship – at times we become very rude and blunt; if that person try to reach-out. We ignore their calls, stop responding to their emails, if you notice them coming your direction, you make a quick change of direction – all because you feel let down by them!

Jesus had three great friends who were members of the same family – a brother and two sisters who lived in a suburb called Bethany. In our Bible reading, John tells us that, Jesus loved these siblings. And based on their friendship, when Lazarus their brother became ill, they send a message to inform Jesus about it. Probably hoping that would drop what he was doing and rush to be with them in their hour of need. But as we know, Jesus did not go right away. The Bible says, he remained where he was for two more days! In their hour of need – when they thought they needed him most – their beloved friend was no where to be seen.

From where they stood, they must have felt so let down and felt a bit resentful hence we hear both of them exclaiming: “Lord if you were here, my brother would not have died”. **Lord if you were here, my brother would not have died!**

Such statement raises questions such as: **In difficult circumstances of our own life, what are we to think, when God does not act as quickly as we would want him to?** I think whatever thoughts might cross our minds; God will always respond in God's time. Take for instance, our present situation: The world over – from medical teams, scientists, world leaders, leaders of all faith backgrounds, communities and individuals; our prayer is – **KUMBAYA OUR LORD KUMBAYA** – *Lord, come by here* – NOW – because we are desperate for divine intervention – But God respond in God's time , ours is to trust him.

When we are in the thick of trials, it is normal to feel abandoned, isolated, dejected and helpless. But we are never alone. Though it may seem as if all hope is gone, it is important that we trust God's word. From our bible reading today; when the messenger brought the news of Lazarus' illness, (*at the beginning of this story v3*) -the message given to take back to Martha and Mary was: **"This illness does not lead to death but rather, it is for God's Glory"** A statement which seem to contradict what really happened; but in actual fact it meant something extraordinary; beyond human comprehension.

Martha couldn't comprehend her brother raising from the dead, "there is stench, she protested." Martha's response demonstrates how difficult it is to believe in something so inconceivable? It was inconceivable not only because nature had taken its course on Lazarus's body that had been buried for 4 days but also **There was a tradition that one's soul hovered near the body for three days. After that time, there was no hope of resurrection. So, for them, Lazarus was surely gone.**

It is important to note here that, Jesus never reprimanded Martha for being so sceptical. Instead He seem to hope for Martha and us all, to be open to what God can do even in those moments when we feel we cannot quit get what it is we are grappling with – he seem to hope for us to be open to the possibility that our way of thinking can be wrong or that there could be better ways of understanding the same thing apart from that which our traditions dictate to us.

However, I would like to think that Jesus does know the legitimacy of how we approach situations. Jesus recognised the legitimacy of Martha's sentiments, and the same applies to us. He understand us and wishes to meet us where we are – within our traditions, our confusions, hopelessness and frustrations, he invites us to be open to His plans even though those plans might not make sense to us: "Take away the stone". He said to Martha, **"Take away the stone"**. In faith, Martha obeyed – trusting in the word of him who know her best.

In the depth of our despair, our fears, worries and concerns. In the depth of grappling with the crisis caused by coronavirus, let us keep trusting God, that something good, great and wonderful will come out

of this corona season. I don't know about you, for me, I think people are looking out for each other more; people are spending more time with their families and making lasting memories; families are also looking out for their loved ones more; people seem be more conscious about their hygiene now; I think the world is cleaner as each company scrub their area top to bottom; there is less noise pollution – air pollution, water pollution; the world is quieter than it has ever been – surely that must be great for us and our environment.

As coronavirus keeps us contained in our countries and our homes— at least for the coming month— it is already reshaping our society in ways that will last. Even as a church, we are also being challenged to find pragmatic alternatives of worship; of pastoral care; of communion and holding other related meetings and gatherings.

Surely, what is bound to come out of this dark stench pit of our time is for the Glory of God to be see. Just as Lazarus was walked out of that dark cave, we shall also be set free and see the light once more.

As we look to the week ahead us, let us be encouraged by the words of Paul to the Galatians: “Let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up” (Galatians 6:9 NLT). Remain in faith, and continue to love and serve the Lord in all the ways we can. **DON'T GIVE UP HOPE.**

As Julian Norwich prayed, let us also pray together:

**All shall be well. All shall be well. Every manner of thing shall be well.
Amen. (Julian Norwich)**

HYMN

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and grief to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer
O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden
Cumbered with a load of care?
Jesus is our only refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer
In his arms he'll take and shield you
You will find a solace there.

BLESSING

Any day that you choose to act, choose hope.
The future is dark, but it is in darkness that seeds sprout
Celebrate even the darkness, because in it may be hidden new
opportunities and new life.

And may the God of hope, the God of second chances, the God of
resurrection bless you with strength and courage today and the days
ahead. **Amen.**