

Surf Coast Uniting Churches

Sunday 22nd March 2026



Introit 407 Breathe on me Breath of God

Breathe on me, breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love all that you love
and do what you would do.

Welcome

May the Worship bless you



*Luke from Gunditjmara Country – Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Portland
Guide at Budj Bim.*

Acknowledgment

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the Wadawurrung people, traditional custodians of this land under God. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

Loving God
Hear our cry
Bring us to life

Redeeming God
Rescue us
Bring us to life

Spirit of God
Breathe on us
Bring us to life



Prayers

Ruth Harvey, Eggs and ashes, edit. Ruth Burgess & Chris Polhil, Wild Goose Publications 2004 www.lonabooks.com

Lord, our God
 you have called us to be a people
 with purpose
 travelling without a map
 travelling to where we are led
 sustained by your Spirit
 committed to the gospel
 by the hope of the world.

Take us on our journey
 from where we are to what you want us to be
 so that we become a community
 where all are welcomed and no one is excluded
 all are valued and no one is made to feel inadequate
 all are forgiven and no one is ashamed to belong
 all are encouraged and no one is too hurt to come among us

Lead us on our journey
 from who we are to who you want us to be
 so that patience is built into us
 kindness is assumed in us
 gentleness is part of us
 compassion flows from us
 truth is second nature to us
 and the commitment of love is part of us. Amen

We spend a moment before you Lord
 bringing all that's on our heart
 hoping for forgiveness, grace and healing

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Our sins are forgiven"
Thanks be to God.

Greeting of Peace
 May the peace of the Lord be with you
And also with you

Let's offer each other the greeting of peace

Hymn 584 V 2,3,5,6 Just as I am

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fighting's and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Reading John 11:1-45, 12 :1-3 NRSV Update

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus,^[a] "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ 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."

⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus^[b] was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right."^[c] ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin,^[d] said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

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

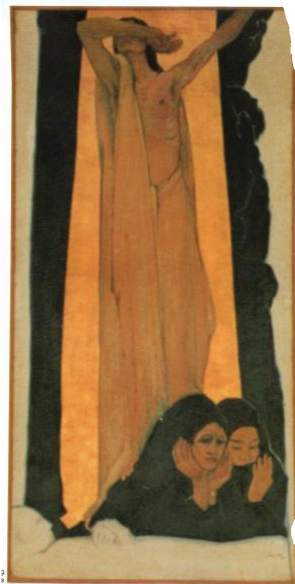
²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ 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. ³² 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." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But 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. ⁴⁶

12 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them^[1] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Sermon

in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.

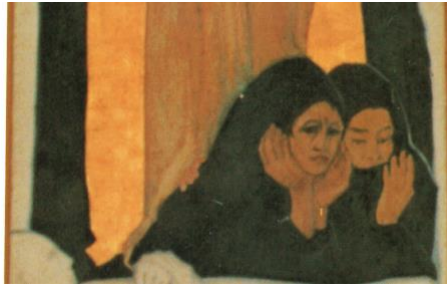


Recently, a group of us were having a conversation about death and dying. Stories were shared about family and friends who had died and funerals. We are a people of stories, narratives, and memories. Often, we don't know much about a person's story, until their funeral.

Some of us like to do our family trees. We want to know about our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents lives and where we came from.

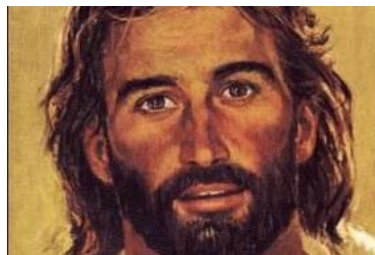
Jesus was a close friend of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Yet, after receiving a message about his friend, he didn't go to his death bed or to his funeral.

Mary and Martha knew he was nearby. We can understand why they felt hurt about him not coming, when needed.



By the time Jesus arrives at Bethany it's been four days. Martha sets out to meet him and rebukes him. Jesus speaks to Martha about God's ways and faith. He contrasts those who walk in the light of faith with those who stumble about in the darkness of fear. I doubt Martha would have taken in much of what he said when she was feeling raw and numb over the death of her brother.

Jesus reveals his identity to Martha. He tells her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'



Martha shares her belief in the resurrection of all at the end times when all the dead will be taken up into paradise. She doesn't understand. She declares Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that God will do anything he asks.

Her comprehension is limited. Yet she still has steadfast faith, while suffering deeply and grieving for her brother.

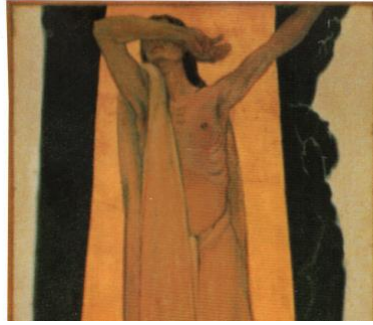
It is a different story for Mary. She comes to meet Jesus on the city's outskirts. She falls at Jesus feet. Perhaps she knows in her heart who he is and worships him. She also rebukes him for not coming to help her brother in his hour of need.

We are told that when Jesus arrives at the tomb, he is greatly disturbed. He weeps. I wonder if he had doubts. What he was doing was costly for him. He loved his friend Lazarus. Those who see him weeping say he does care. Others rebuke him for not coming to the bedside of Lazarus to heal him. Jesus continues to weep. Despite believing in all God can do and has done, Jesus grieves and suffers deeply for his friend Lazarus.

When Jesus asks for the stone to be rolled back from the tomb, Martha complains, saying he's dead and his body smells.

When the stone is removed Jesus thanks God for hearing him. He does this so the group of mourners will believe. He commands Lazarus to rise.

The dead man comes out!



What an amazing statement. The dead man comes out.

In the painting it looks like Lazarus is stretching after a long sleep. Perhaps this shows the artist believes death is a like a deep sleep.

Lazarus was all bandaged up. Imagine how Mary and Martha felt. It would have been terrifying and horrible when he walked out of the tomb. Perhaps they all fell the ground, in shock and awe.

Jesus asks the sisters and mourners to unbind Lazarus and set him free. If he were dead, they would not touch him. They'd be afraid of becoming ritually unclean and not being able to worship in the Synagogue. They must have realised he was alive!

They touch Lazarus and unwrap the bandages from him. He is alive! He is free!
Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead.



Sometime after the raising of Lazarus, Mary comes with oils to anoint Jesus. Costly beautiful, perfumed oils. In front of everyone, she humbly dries his feet with her hair. Her love for her friend is scandalous, costly and deep.

Perhaps she has heard the religious authorities are plotting to kill Jesus and she's preparing his body for death and burial. Perhaps she is feeling deep gratitude for Jesus bringing her beloved brother back to her.

The gospel points to Jesus' death and resurrection. Perhaps it offers us hope before we begin the journey of remembering Jesus' death and being reminded of the deaths in our lives.

Those of us who witness a relative dying well and passing peacefully, would say death is a moment of grace and is sacred. This doesn't take away grief.

Many couples say when their partner dies, they lose part of themselves. It's like they were a match and each other's strength made them both whole.

On one of my travels, I met a monk called brother Angelo from the Little Family of the Resurrection on the mount of olives just above the old city of Jerusalem. . The monk spoke of husband and wife. He said over time the husband comes to have the will of the wife, and the wife comes to have the will of the husband and together they come to know the love of Christ in one another. Often there is a huge hole left in a person's life when their partner passes away. We can understand how many couples hope to be reunited in heaven.

Often people feel the presence of their loved one in their homes after they die. It's a comforting presence. Many talk to their partners. Perhaps their loved one is watching over them and praying for them to grieve well and heal, so they can embrace new beginnings, rather than suffer forever.

Some Scots believe in thin places, where the veil between heaven and earth is thin. Perhaps the thought our loved ones can see us from the other side is comforting.

There are many beliefs about death

The story of Lazarus is about death not being the end, and final. It's good to have this story before we begin our journey to Easter.

We may start our journey trying to think things through like Martha, where we don't understand the mystery of death and resurrection or eternal life and like Martha, we don't need to know everything, to have faith in Jesus. Most of us spend a lot of time living in our heads and being faithful disciples, doing our best to live out our faith

Mary had spent time sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to him until the day came Paul spoke of, when the morning star rose in her heart and she knew. She didn't intellectually comprehend. She just knew.

Perhaps all of us spend time journeying where we can be Martha one day and Mary another day. Perhaps this is the good news for us. It's ok.

The Lord be with you

YouTube: The Vicar of Dibley the Lord is my Shepherd

<https://youtu.be/lAZN1oVir5A?si=on9aJqvub0KbF2mD>

Offering

Lord, giver of every good thing, we bring to you our lives, gifts and resources for the building up of your kingdom and church. We give thanks for blessings and transformation that come through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

Prayers of the People

Prayers for peace for the world and for each one of us

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 forever. Amen



Hymn 658 I the Lord of Sea and Sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry
 All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save.
 I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
 Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord; is it I, Lord?
 I have heard you calling in the night;
 I will go, Lord, if you'll lead me.
 I will hold your people in my heart.*

Notices and Sharing

Blessing

God be with us on our journey
 Jesus, guide us in your love
 Lord, gift us through each other.
 Renew us as your pilgrim people,
 through your Holy Spirit.

Hymn 779 May the Feet of God

May the feet of God walk with you,
 and his hand hold you tight.
 May the eye of God rest on you,
 and his ear hear your cry.
 May the smile of God be for you,
 and his breath give you life.
 May the Child of God grow in you,
 and his love bring you home.

Aubrey Podlich 1946