March 29th, 2020 Fifth Sunday of Lent

GREETING OF PEACE

Peace be with you.

LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

Good morning and welcome to this online gathering of Rosedale United Church. It’s good to be with you and to be together during this season of Lent. For those who I haven’t met, I am Rev. Roberta, the Acting Youth and Community Minister here at Rosedale. Rev. Kristin, our lead minister, is away this week, preparing her Doctoral Thesis defence. We keep her in our prayers and wish her good luck.

Our core practices at Rosedale United are to learn, to grow, and to serve, regardless of whether we’re gathering online or in person. We hope that you are able to enjoy these services as a place to centre your thoughts and prayers, and to take it with you into your week. We also encourage you to check out our website, where we will post more resources, links to gatherings and events including a Maundy Thursday Communion, and offer other ways we can serve those in our community.

So let’s center ourselves, and settle into this time together with our gathering prayer…

GATHERING PRAYER,

O Source of Love, and Life,

As we enter this time of worship, across time and space,

Help us still our thoughts.

Help us steady our hands.

Help us remember why we are across time and space today, that it is for the healing of the Earth.

Above all, as we enter this time of worship, remind us that worship does not end with Amen.

We will still be in your presence today, tomorrow, and every day hereafter.

Amen.

LORD’S PRAYER

***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.***

THEME TIME

I invite us to talk about the one thing that this community hates to talk about: Feelings.

What are you feeling right now? Is it different from what you were feeling last week?

If you are with others, feel free to share with them! If you wish, please let us know in the comments. There is no wrong answer.

Community prayer

It is at this time that I want us to do a community prayer. Let us pray:

* Patients with COVID-19
* Patients with other health conditions, and their loved ones
* First responders, health care workers, emergency personnel, grocery store clerks and other workers deemed essential to our lives.
* Travelers both returning home and stuck in uncertain predicaments
* For those whose mental health is being severely impacted by isolation and distancing
* For those who do not have a home to shelter in, or their home is not safe.

FIRST READING John 11:1-45, a modified reading so we aren’t here for 6 hours.

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, brother of Mary and Martha. The sisters sent a message to Jesus, "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 He stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

When Jesus finally arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 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. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die”.

She went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 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 other 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. Then, greatly disturbed, they came to the tomb. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone. 41 So they took away the stone. He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The 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." 45 Many of the people therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

MESSAGE

I always wondered what kind of crier Jesus was. This was the man that overturned tables in temples when he was upset, so I don’t think we are talking about a sweet and delicate stifled sob with a gentle tear down the cheek, a la Elizabeth Taylor or something. I think he would have had a right proper wail. Tearing at his clothes, shaking is fist, more like the ending of Planet of the Apes, minus the cursing.

I think about this because of all the portrayals of Jesus in film and television. He is ethereal, untouchable, a patient but emotionless teacher and friend who will offer a kind smile and a hug. A statue.

So to hear that he wept, sobbed, broke down at the impact of Lazarus’ death and the grief everyone else was feeling is a bit jarring. This isn’t the Jesus we are used to.

Maybe it is a good thing that Jesus is not in charge of the logistics of today. I mean yes, king of kings and all that, but I don’t think Jesus could do a spreadsheet or phone tree to save anyone. We don’t need Jesus for that. We have each other. This past week has been emails and phone calls and open-shared documents going back and forth to put some organization to the chaos. A routine should be established. Responsibilities doled out. A checklist, my kingdom for a coherent checklist!

And then the flurry of emails stop for a few hours. And the online meetings are done. And we are left alone with the news and our thoughts. And those thoughts aren’t fun.

*When will this end? What will our numbers be like? How far ahead can I plan? May, June, October, next January? What do I do? What do we do?*

I asked you how you were feeling. I imagine a lot of you are going to say “fine”.

It is okay to not be fine with what is going on in the world right now. Aside from the pandemic, there are wars and famine, ecological nightmares and good old-fashioned racism. Throw in trying to stay cheerful and happy because we think that is what others need, and it is a lot for us to carry. Before this service, I let out the most primal yell I could do. It probably terrified the ghosts in this place, if not the neighbours. But darn it, it was what I needed to do.

Jesus isn’t saying to abandon all hope, or to let cynicism take over, declaring this is the end of humanity as we know it. But Jesus is reminding us that it is okay to not be okay. After all, if anyone knew that there is life after death, it would be the man who floats between both like there is nothing but a screen door between them. And still, he wept. He processed what he was feeling, acknowledged that just because he knew that things would get better doesn’t mean that things are good *now*.

It is okay to be vulnerable. Jesus was very vulnerable, and last time I checked, none of us are him. We don’t need to be trying to be better than the Son of God. Indeed, we can learn from him. Cry, if you need to. Yell, once or twice, at the universe. Sit with that uneasy grief you have been holding for a world that seems so long ago. Then, call on the miracle. Lazarus will rise. And so will we.

Amen.

May the blessing of God go before you. May God's Grace and peace abound. May God's Spirit live within you.  
May God's Love wrap you ‘round. May God’s Blessing remain with you always. May you walk on holy ground.

Amen.