**Opening Prayer**

Loving God, I come to you now just as I am. Help me to focus on you now, and hear your voice speaking to me through your word. May I lay aside all those things that would distract me, and enable me to focus on you instead. Lord, your word is a lamp to my feet, may I be guided by you through this time together. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen,

***Read Psalm 130***

Sing or read the hymn, ***Just as I am*** (Charlotte Elliott 1789-1871)

1 Just as I am, without one plea, 2 Just as I am, and waiting not

But that Thy blood was shed for me, To rid my soul of one dark blot;

And that Thou bid’st me come to Thee, To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,

O Lamb of God, I come! I come! O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

3 Just as I am, though tossed about 4 Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;

With many a conflict, many a doubt; Sight, riches, healing of the mind;

Fightings within, and fears without, Yes, all I need, in Thee to find,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come! O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

5 Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, 6 Just as I am, Thy love unknown

Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; Has broken every barrier down;

Because Thy promise I believe, Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come! O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

**Prayer**

Loving Heavenly Father, I worship you this day. You have made the heavens and the earth and everything in them. The whole of creation shouts aloud of your glory! May I join with the praise of nature, in declaring that you alone are God, and to you all praise belongs. I praise you for giving me life and for always being with me. Help me remember that you are in control, and that I can trust you all the time.

Forgive me my sins, I pray, and help me to truly repent of them. Reassure me of your forgiveness and protect me from all that is to come. Thank you for your grace, mercy and forgiveness to me. This I pray in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, amen.

Old Testament Reading: ***Ezekiel 37:1-14***

New Testament Reading: ***John 11:20-45***

**Reflection**

Ezekiel’s prophetic vision is very vivid. A valley of dry bones that comes to life again as Ezekiel obeys God’s instruction to him. Thankfully Ezekiel has the meaning explained to him, as otherwise I think we might struggle to make sense of it. This vision is NOT about us being able to breathe new life into anyone or anything – only God can do that. This vision rather shows us how God would breathe new life into his people, Israel, bringing them back to the promised land from exile. This was fulfilled when the nation returned physically to Palestine, and spiritually to God.

This prophecy also looks beyond that time to the coming of Jesus, and perhaps also to his second coming. In verse 12 God says “I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them.” This happened in a limited way when Jesus was crucified (see Matthew 10:45-56), but it will happen at the judgement when Jesus will judge the living and the dead. Speaking of the dead being raised back to life we come to our reading from John’s Gospel, where Jesus raises his friend Lazarus. There are so many things to say about this key passage in the gospel, but I’m going to limit myself to a couple of important points.

Firstly, Jesus has the power over life and death. There is no question Lazarus was dead - he’d been in the tomb for two days by this time. This is a foretaste of what was to happen on the third day after Jesus was crucified – he rose from the dead also! Lazarus would die again in a few years time, but Jesus is still alive, hallelujah! It also shows us that Jesus is who he said he was – the Son of God, the Messiah promised by the prophets. In him alone can we find life eternal.

Let me leave you with these words from our Lord Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25) This is the most important question of all now, and always. We have hope in Jesus Christ, and that is so much better than any hope the world can possibly give us. Amen.

**Prayers**

* God of grace and compassion, our hearts are full of gratitude as we think of the many blessings in our lives: the gift of faith to believe in you, the love of family and friends, shelter, clean water and plentiful food, for access to education and health care, and for freedom of speech.
* As we turn our attention to the world, may we never lose sight of the fact that we are all loved by you, O God. We pray for those who are ill at this time, particularly those infected with coronavirus. We pray for all emergency service workers and other key workers and ask that you would grant them peace at this stressful time. Lord, we pray too for rulers and governments asking that you give them wisdom as to how best to address this crisis.
* Loving God, we pray too for your church throughout the world. In many places we are unable to physically meet together. Keep reminding us that we are united by your Holy Spirit. Grant us courage, faith and love at this troubling time.
* Father, we pray now for individuals we know who need your help…
* Finally Lord, we pray for ourselves. Be with us in our difficulties and loneliness. Remind us of your presence and love. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour, amen.

**The 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 that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

**Prayer of blessing**

Heavenly Father, I commit myself into your hands now, asking that you would strengthen and encourage me today. May your blessing also be upon my family, friends and all your people this day and forevermore. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.