

These short acts of worship have been produced for you by The Vine at Home. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

### Opening Prayers

God is everywhere  
In this space and all spaces  
In this time and all times.

God is waiting to meet you and is ready to welcome you  
Just as it has been for all eternity  
So be still.

Pause

Get ready to notice the spirit working:  
Through words on the page  
Through sounds around you  
Through familiar and unfamiliar smells  
Through all that you see when you look up from what you are reading  
Through the touch of your hands as you hold them together to pray.

So be still.

Pause

If you feel able, speak aloud the following words:  
God of all time and space I notice you here. I am ready.  
Amen.

### The Lord's Prayer

We pray the prayer that Jesus gave us:

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.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

**Reading: John 11:32-44**

## Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

<sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

## Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

## Responding to the reading

At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf says to the hobbits: 'I will not say do not weep, for not all tears are an evil.'

Today, including in our gospel reading, there are tears, and perhaps today is a day for recognising the need to cry... People vary in how much or how often they shed tears – some of us rarely get through a day without the need for a tissue, for others, only the most painful or tragic happenings cause tears to flow. Today, as we celebrate the season of All Saints, is a day when emotion may be close to the surface, and that's okay.

Marking 1st November as All Saints Day began sometime in the 9th Century, so it is a very long-established part of the annual Christian calendar, but even before then days and dates had been set aside to remember those who had died in the faith – saints and martyrs, known and unknown. It remains a special season, connecting with our mixed emotions of thankfulness and sorrow – celebrating those

people who have cheered us along the way, yet often still mourning their loss.

Jesus is our image of God incarnate – a God of love, made human. What God will one day do for all humanity, Jesus comes and does for particular human beings at a particular time – a sign and foretaste of what is to come. So Jesus gathers with friends at a time of mourning and he too begins to weep. This is a very well-known verse in the bible, in some translations it is just two words, 'Jesus wept', making it the shortest verse. It is also an extremely significant verse, demonstrating the full humanity of Jesus who enters into the emotional range of human life and knows what it is to grieve and to cry. Let's not forget that when we find we can't hold back the tears. As we noted with that quote from Gandalf: there is no shame in needing to express our grief in this way.

Elsewhere in Scripture, we read about visions of the future, of a heaven where we are told that one day all weeping will end, which is good news, but may not do much to address our present feelings of grief in this life. We all have reason to be sorrowful – we have all known the death of a friend or family member, we all look at the news and feel grief for the suffering of the innocent in war, through famine and disease, through human greed and exploitation. Why should we believe that one day tears will be wiped away and sorrow ended?

And in this incredible gospel story, we see another foretaste of this time to come – this time where death will no longer be final. Something which is prophesied by Isaiah is explored by the

Revelation of John - another book written in a time of oppression, persecution and despair - and is enfolded by Jesus who gives us the downpayment in raising Lazarus to life. God means business about destroying death. What that means for me and for you, with our own personal griefs and sorrows, it's hard to say. Will we see our loved ones again? Or will it be better than that? We don't know and can't guess.

There is one more thing we do know, however, one more common feature in these three passages, and perhaps this is the one to which we have to cling in 2024 in the midst of all the sorrows and questions of our life now. There has to be a waiting time.

If you have time today, read the whole of John chapter 11 and notice how the tension is built up, with waiting time a very real part of the story. Having heard that Lazarus is ill, Jesus does not rush to Bethany, where they lived, but waits two days (v6). Why? When he does get there (v17) he finds that Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days, and Martha later points out that there will be a stench for that very reason. Martha comes out to meet Jesus and says, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died' (v21). When Mary meets Jesus, in today's passage, she says the same words, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died'. The implication is clear from both sisters, Jesus could have arrived earlier, he could have prevented Lazarus's death and the four days of weeping, mourning and heartbreak which Mary and Martha have experienced could have been avoided. But it wasn't. They had to wait, they had to suffer first. Why?

It's quite a hard question to answer, and maybe it's not the right question to ask. Maybe we simply have to say, 'That was how it happened, Jesus was some distance away, he was doing things he had to do, he didn't arrive until four days after the death'. All that is true, but perhaps we can also read into this something else which might help us deal with our own lives in the here and now. The final fulfilment of God's destruction of death is still in the future and so we have to endure the waiting time. Yes, the resurrection of Christ, even more than the raising of Lazarus, has sealed the deal, has shown God's hand, has demonstrated God's power over death, but it remains just a foretaste...for now.

So, although in this season of All Saints we may and should shed tears for the pain of heartbreak we know in our lives, missing those we love, we can believe that the pain we feel will one day come to an end. If you can...just sit quietly for a few moments and allow your own emotions to come to the surface... Pray about how you feel, and if you need to cry, that's okay.

Some questions to consider and reflect on this week. If you have an opportunity to meet up with someone you trust, perhaps you could discuss your responses with them, and ask them some of these questions too:

Do you agree that knowing that pain will come to an end makes it easier to bear? Do you have experience of this?

How do you respond to the saying: 'It will be all right in the end, and if it's not all right, it's not the end'.

How can your home, your community, or your church (if applicable) be a place 'where tears are understood'?

### Responding in prayer

I take a moment today, at the start of November, as autumn begins to turn darker, wetter, colder, to pray for all who are overwhelmed by grief:

Grief for loved ones who have died...

Grief for the harsh realities of living with war, famine, oppression, exploitation...

Grief for family and friends living with pain and distress...

God of all comfort, draw near in Christ to all who weep. Wipe away their tears, assure them of your presence, give courage for the next step... Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

God of all compassion, draw near in Christ to all who wish things were different. Show them your heart of sorrow and speak to them your words of healing and restoration... Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

I pray today for all who work in places of death and despair:

For medical staff dealing daily with the stench and heartbreak of death...

For counsellors seeking to accompany people on difficult journeys...

For the Samaritans, listening to those who have lost their way in life...

God of all understanding, draw near in Christ to all who seek to offer hope and purpose. Stand by them as they face the abyss and point them towards the glory which is to come... Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

And I take a moment to give thanks today for all who have gone before and showed me the way:

For the saints whose lives inspire me to persevere in the journey, step by step...

For my loved ones who showed me something of your nature in their lives...

For those whose witness and sacrifice built this community that I call home... God of all time, you hold in your hands the lives of all who have lived, the lives of all who will live, and my own life. Lord in your mercy, help me to be an answer to prayer.

Amen.

## Responding in music

### 123 STF – Come, thou fount of every blessing

Sing/read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

[https://youtu.be/5FgdCskC0QE?si=it-yDohAE4ZVFy\\_a](https://youtu.be/5FgdCskC0QE?si=it-yDohAE4ZVFy_a)

- 1 Come, you thankful people, come,  
raise the song of harvest home!  
Fruit and crops are gathered in  
safe before the storms begin:  
God our maker will provide  
for our needs to be supplied;  
come, with all his people, come,  
raise the song of harvest home!
- 2 All the world is God's own field,  
harvests for his praise to yield;  
wheat and weeds together sown  
here for joy or sorrow grown:  
first the blade and then the ear,  
then the full corn shall appear —  
Lord of harvest, grant that we  
wholesome grain and pure may be.
- 3 For the Lord our God shall come  
and shall bring his harvest home;  
he himself on that great day,  
worthless things shall take away,  
give his angels charge at last

in the fire the weeds to cast,  
but the fruitful ears to store  
in his care for evermore.

- 4 Even so, Lord, quickly come —  
bring your final harvest home!  
Gather all your people in  
free from sorrow, free from sin,  
there together purified,  
ever thankful at your side —  
come, with all your angels, come,  
raise the glorious harvest-home!

Henry Alford (1810–1871)

**503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling**

Sing/read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

[https://youtu.be/8ha3eFloXQ4?si=BLf5bVqRQU6\\_9LVU](https://youtu.be/8ha3eFloXQ4?si=BLf5bVqRQU6_9LVU)

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

- 3 Finish then thy new creation,  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation,  
perfectly restored in thee:  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

**Blessing**  
Lord Jesus Christ,

Thank you for being a God of justice, love and mercy. I ask that you help me to live after your example, to be a model for those around me.

Holy Spirit, fill me anew, that I might have the words to speak of your love, and that I would demonstrate that love through my actions.

Amen.

*Most materials on this service sheet are from **The Vine at Home**, compiled and produced by twelvebaskets, © ordinary 20B - 18th August 2024.*