Lord, the one whom you love is ill.

I didn’t plan to give up fish fry, in-person worship, eating in restaurants and getting my hair done for Lent. I didn’t plan on hearing every night that more people were getting sick and dying. I didn’t plan on parishioners that I care about being sick or losing loved ones and me not being able to be physically present with them.

For all of us, I suspect, this Lent has been very different from what we would have imagined. The change and sense of loss is great. The anxiety challenges us. The isolation is difficult; some of us are lonely. We worry about ourselves and our friends and family. Not being able to physically be with them often makes the sense of anxiety greater.

Lord, those whom you love are ill.

We are ill – some of us physically, most of us emotionally and mentally. Just like Mary and Martha, we want Jesus to immediately come and bring healing. We can’t understand why Jesus isn’t doing that right now – healing all the people with coronavirus and making the virus go away. Maybe we are even like Mary and Martha thinking to ourselves or even crying out in prayer, “Lord if you had been here (this wouldn’t have happened).”

God doesn’t act the way we want Him too. When we expect God to act in a certain way, we are assuming that we always know what’s best. We’re making ourselves God instead of Him. Jesus had a purpose behind waiting four days to come to Bethany, and, even though it pained Him to know those whom he loved were hurting, Jesus stuck to that higher purpose. It wasn’t clear to Mary and Martha what that was. It’s not clear to us why God allows bad things such as the coronavirus to happen. God loves us. God cares for us. We believe that God gives us victory over everything in the world, including diseases. In the midst of this pandemic, some of us may find it easy to continue to trust in God. For some of us, our faith in God may even be growing.

Some of us may find it more difficult – for many of us who weren’t alive during World War II or the height of the Cold War – this is the first real national threat we’ve experienced. It seems even more real than 9/11. Perhaps we are beginning to question whether Jesus really is here – whether Jesus will come to help us in time.

Here’s the Good News. Jesus is always with us. Remember his parting words to his disciples in Matthew, “I am with you always.” Jesus always helps at the perfect time. That may not be clear to us in the midst of crisis, but, for each crisis we’ve experienced so far, when we look back we realize this is so. Jesus is helping us right now, in fact. Jesus is with us when others can’t visit us. Jesus is with our family and friends that we can only see over Facetime. Jesus is in the sharing within community, the help we give to each other, and the commiseration between peoples of other countries (such as Italy) and us. Jesus brings resurrection. Resurrection is literal for those who may die of this virus – we know that God has prepared a mansion for them with Him. But resurrection is also for us – our spiritual transformation – and for society, which will be made new through this crisis and as we come out this crisis.

What did the world look like to Lazarus when he came out of the tomb to be part of earth again? The Jews believed that the dead slept until the time of the coming of the Messiah when the righteous then would all rise. So, perhaps, Lazarus was asleep and woke up rejoicing to see his family again. Perhaps he couldn’t figure out why he’d been bound up like a mummy! Or perhaps, as most of us believe, Lazarus had already gone to be with God and was being interrupted in that place to be brought back to earth. If that’s the case, then he had a lot to tell his sisters about what he had seen there. He could help grow their faith about what was ahead for them. Perhaps he began to see earthly trials and everyday life in a different perspective; earning extra money for a larger residence was now less important than simply being with those he loved, than simply spending time with God.

However the world looked to Lazarus once he came out of that tomb, it was different than how it looked before he went into the tomb. Because God loved Lazarus, Lazarus’s way of seeing the world was transformed in a way that brought spiritual transformation for Lazarus, and likely for his sisters, too.

Lord, we whom you love are ill.

The world will look different for us once we come out on the other side of this COVID-19 pandemic. Because God loves us, our way of seeing the world will be transformed. We will grow and the world will grow and be transformed as well.

In the midst of this pandemic, we are called to trust in God – to be assured that God hasn’t forgotten us and that God will deliver us. We are called to wait on God, to constantly watch for God. God is hope. God is mercy. God brings transformation to those whom God loves. God is here to heal us.

Let go of your worries. Let God be God. Be healed.

Many thanks to The Rev Canon Ruth Woodliff-Stanley whose reflections on Paintbrush informed my own.