

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 04/04/21 – Easter Sunday

Opening declaration

A day of joy, a day of hope, come let us celebrate, for Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Hymn: STF 298 – Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

1. Christ the Lord is risen today; Alleluia!
All creation joins to say; Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high; Alleluia!
Sing, you heavens, let earth reply; Alleluia!
2. Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won; Alleluia!
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; Alleluia!
Christ has burst the gates of hell; Alleluia!
3. Lives again our glorious King; Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now your sting? Alleluia!
Once he died, our souls to save; Alleluia!
Where's your victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!
4. Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head; Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise; Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies; Alleluia!
5. King of Glory! Soul of bliss! Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
You to know, your power to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love: Alleluia!

Bible reading - Psalm 118: 15-24 ¹

Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: 'The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.

Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.

I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

Prayer of Praise ²

Glory to you, Father God: you raised Jesus from the grave, bringing victory over death and giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ: for us and for our salvation you overcame death and opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, Holy Spirit: you lead us into the truth and breathe new life into us all.

Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Hymn: STF 313 – Edmond Budry (1854-1932) translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875-1939)

Thine be the glory,
Risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory
Thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment
Rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave-clothes
Where Thy body lay.
*Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son;
endless is the victory
Thou o'er death hast won!*

Lo, Jesus meets us,
Risen from the tomb!
Lovingly He greets us,
Scatters fear and gloom.
Let the church with gladness
Hymns of triumph sing,
For her Lord now liveth,
Death hath lost its sting.

No more we doubt Thee,
Glorious Prince of life;
Life is naught without Thee:
Aid us in our strife;
Make us more than conquerors,
Through Thy deathless love;
Lead us in Thy triumph
To Thy home above.

Reading – 1 Corinthians 15: 1-8¹

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Reading – Mark 16: 1-8¹

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶ 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.' ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" ⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Reflection

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth and reminds them about the gospel, the Good News, of the resurrection of Jesus. Mark began his account of the life of Jesus by stating that it is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. When we get to the end of Mark's gospel, his book of good news, it does not sound like good news. We have a detailed description of the last week and especially the last hours of Jesus' life, his betrayal, trial, torture and horrific death as a criminal hung naked on a rough wooden cross until he died of asphyxiation and exhaustion. Then after the Sabbath rest we find three confused and fearful women visiting the tomb to complete the anointing of Jesus' body with the spices they had bought. This doesn't sound like good news either. This may be compounded by the fact that many scholars believe the last part of Mark's gospel is lost to us. That makes some sense to me. Why would Mark not expand on the resurrection as Matthew, Luke and John do when his declared intention is to write about the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Well let's leave that speculation to the Biblical scholars and see what we have. I think we will see it is still remarkable.

Death, like birth, was women's work. After the violence and injustice inflicted upon the one they loved, in the stillness of the early morning, they came to do what they could, what women have done and still do in many societies today, to prepare a body for proper burial. Here we see these devoted and courageous women approaching the tomb which they had seen sealed on the evening of Jesus' death. Only then did they think to ask who would move the stone guarding the entrance to this borrowed tomb. How very human and real is that, just the kind of authenticating evidence that the resurrection accounts are full of. Which of us has not realised what we have forgotten and should have planned for only when it is needed? On arrival the problem of moving the stone no longer troubles them because it has already been moved. So they enter the tomb perhaps expecting to find someone else at work caring for Jesus' body. Instead they are pointed to a new reality and given a message to share. He is not here, he has risen. Look at the place where they laid him. As John's gospel in particular makes clear looking at the place where Jesus' body had lain and seeing the grave clothes was crucial. In this we are not always helped by hymn writers. We will willingly sing 'Angels in bright raiment, rolled the stone away, kept the folded grave-clothes where Thy body lay,' as though the angels had been tidying up the laundry before the women arrived. However Jesus did not come back to life, he did not start to breathe again as though resuscitated. He was resurrected. He rose to resurrection life to a new condition of existence not known before. His body left the grave clothes in such a way that they collapsed. That would be very obviously different from someone waking up and having to untangle themselves from the grave clothes.

All of this in the immediate was too much for the women. If we're honest and can imagine ourselves into this situation surely it would have been too difficult to comprehend immediately for us too. Perhaps it still is. They trembled with emotional anxiety and shock. They were bewildered and fled in haste from the tomb. They simply did not know what to do - how could they share what they had seen? It would all take some time. Thankfully, although that is where the gospel ends, it is not the end of the story; clearly in due time they realised that what they had seen was true perhaps recalling Jesus' own words predicting it. Crucially they knew they needed to share it as they had been told.

Every Easter Day is an opportunity for us all to visit the tomb again in our minds and imaginations and to feel again the impact of this world-shattering, life-changing moment. I well remember the first occasion on which, although I had heard this account many times before, by the revelation of God I too saw and believed. Like the women we are confronted with a new reality and given a message to share.

We have just lived through a year like no other that will affect the rest of our lives. We are beginning to wake to a new reality, so much has changed, much that we can't yet see or begin to comprehend. Our lives, the life of the church, the life of the community in which we live have changed. God is leading us into that new reality as he led those three women. It is no surprise that like them we can feel fearful, bewildered and unable to speak. Yet we are the ones who should be most familiar with a new reality as Easter people, people of the resurrection, as those who live in the promise of the coming Kingdom of God. Now is the time to find our confidence and to find our voice. That confidence must not be in ourselves but in the timeless and unchanging certainty of the action of God as seen in the empty tomb, the abandoned grave clothes and in the risen Jesus. The world needs to hear now more than ever that there is hope for a new future not just beyond pandemic or beyond climate change but beyond selfishness and greed, beyond evil and darkness, beyond pain and death. The world needs to hear now more than ever that there is hope in Christ alone. So let us go forth and tell.

Hymn: STF 293 ³

All heaven declares
The glory of the risen Lord.
Who can compare
With the beauty of the Lord?
Forever He will be
The Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee
And worship Him alone.

I will proclaim
The glory of the risen Lord,
Who once was slain
To reconcile man to God.
Forever You will be
The Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee
And worship You alone.

Prayers for others and ourselves

Risen Lord Jesus, on this day of joy I recognise that many people are empty.
I come before you now to lift them up into your loving arms.

I pray for this world that so desperately needs your new, transformed life.
Remembering the joy of that first Easter morning,
I pray for the restoration of faith where it is lacking;
For the renewal of hope where it has been lost;
For the rebuilding of peace where it has been shattered and
for the return of harmony where it has been destroyed.
Especially I pray for

I pray for other Christians worldwide
who join with me in praise and worship and for those who are prevented from worshipping.
I pray for the churches of this town and within the Methodist Circuit.
Especially I pray for

I pray for new life and hope for the sick, the weary and the afflicted,
and for comfort and strength for those who mourn the passing of a loved one,
naming before you

I pray for the people I know as family, friends or neighbours who do not know Easter joy, that the
light and revelation of the Easter message may dawn upon them.

I pray for myself that I may know Easter joy and be a carrier of the message of resurrection.
Risen Lord Jesus, I ask all my prayers in your precious name. **Amen.**

Hymn – STF 305 – Robert Lowry (1826-1899)

Low in the grave He lay,
Jesus, my Saviour,
Waiting the coming day,
Jesus, my Lord:

*Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives for ever with His saints to reign:
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*

Vainly they watch His bed,
Jesus, my Saviour;
Vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus, my Lord:

Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord:

Blessing ⁴

May God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen me to walk with
him in his risen life, and may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with me and all
those I love, now and evermore. Amen.

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