

24th April 2022 – Morning Service

Low Sunday

Martin Rider

Call to Worship – Psalm 150

Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD. Amen.

StF 293 – All heaven declares

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 us to God.
Forever You will be the Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee and worship You alone.

Noel & Tricia Richards © 1987 Thankyou Music CCL No. 515642

Prayer

Glorious heavenly Father, we have come here, celebrating the triumph of our Saviour Jesus Christ over sin and death for all humankind. Lord of creation, whose Word created our universe and whose compassion sustains life, for love of sinful human beings like us, you came to our world as Jesus, who shared our lives and experiences, bringing Good News in words and deeds. Our risen Lord offers us everlasting life through his grace, not by anything we deserve or can do to earn it. Like Christians everywhere, we joyfully proclaim, 'Christ is risen! Alleluia!' We ask you to accept our wholehearted thanks for this beautiful, amazing world over which you have given us stewardship. Thank you for all the good things that we enjoy, but most of all we thank you for redeeming us at such terrible cost. We offer you all honour, glory, power and praise in our worship, for you are the one true God, Almighty, yet accessible through our risen Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing our sins.

Hear us, merciful God, as we confess our sinfulness and failure to live as you want us to. We know that we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly. Indeed, we sometimes disregard your call to serve others in your name and we also bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, by acting and speaking in a way that shames us and hurts them.

L: Lord, in your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

We know that, whilst you love us sinners, sin itself angers and grieves you, so we ask you to help us turn away from sin and back to the path you call us to tread. Bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness for the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do.

L: Lord, in your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that in your loving-kindness you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow you as Christ Jesus called his disciples to follow him. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives may provide evidence of our faith and be a beacon to draw others to know and love our risen 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 who 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.**

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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

We continue our worship with Revd. Fred Pratt Green's 1969 version of a hymn written by Revd. George Woodward in 1894. Revd. Fred's words invite to sing joyfully as we proclaim the risen Lord.

StF 314 – This joyful Eastertide

1) This joyful Eastertide,
What need is there for grieving?
Cast all your cares aside
And be not unbelieving:

*Ch) Come, share our Easter joy
That death could not imprison,
Nor any power destroy,
Our Christ, who is arisen, arisen, arisen, arisen!*

2) No work for him is vain,
No faith in him mistaken,
For Easter makes it plain
His kingdom is not shaken:

3) Then put your trust in Christ,
In waking and in sleeping.
His grace on earth sufficed;
He'll never quit his keeping:

Fred Pratt Green © 1969 Stainer & Bell Ltd CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Intercession

We come now to our prayers of intercession. As the horrors of the fighting in Ukraine we begin with a prayer for that country. Let us pray.

Lord of all nations, you made us, you love us all and understand everything about us. Christ died for all people at Calvary to effect the new eternal covenant and to draw us close as your earthly children, but our failure to live in peace with our neighbours is heart-breaking for us as well as to you, especially as we witness the suffering of Ukraine as that country faces attacks by Russia. We pray that a peace treaty can soon be negotiated to end the conflict, that the Kremlin's plans are frustrated and those who have committed war-crimes will face justice in due time. We ask that Ukraine will remain a free, democracy after hostilities have ceased and that other nations will continue to provide practical support and hospitality not only during the conflict, but as long as help is needed.

In your mercy Lord, be with the Ukrainian people. Grant President Zelenskyy and his advisors the wisdom and judgment needed to lead the people throughout and beyond the conflict. We pray the armed forces and militia will be given the means to resist Russia's might. Loving God, enfold in your arms Ukrainian civilians, who have to shelter from bombardment in appalling need and conditions. Protect them as a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings. Grant them steadfast courage and look on them with compassion. Remember, too, Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. May they be made welcome and receive all the support they need. Above all, Lord, restore peace to Ukraine and help it rebuild what war has destroyed. We offer our prayer in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

We continue with prayers about our concerns for the world.

Loving God, Jesus' passion, death and resurrection remind us that you care for us with love that knows neither boundaries, nor imposes conditions. Teach us to share your love with our neighbours, nearby and far away. Grant us faith, wisdom, compassion and steadfastness to serve you as you desire. Do not let us not close our eyes and hearts to injustice, prejudice or neglect, but instead bid us strive courageously for the wellbeing of everyone we meet.

Lord of all nations, besides praying for an end to the conflict in Ukraine, we pray for peace across the world. Guide national leaders to resolve disputes with neighbours by negotiation rather than resorting to military action. Instead, may they learn to rule with justice and mercy, for only then can true peace be established and prevail. In your mercy, hear our prayer for all victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution. Grant them the resources and encouragement they need to rebuild their lives and to be healed in body, mind and spirit.

We pray for the people of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan where serious famines may lead to catastrophic loss of life unless direct action is swiftly taken. May the situation in Ukraine not divert the attention of governments and relief agencies from providing much-needed aid.

Lord of healing, reach out to people who are sick, infirm, troubled or lonely and particularly all who live with a dementia, their friends, families and carers. We remember those whose conditions have deteriorated because of the pandemic preventing them from being treated. Reach out to them in mercy, offering comfort, renewed strength, hope, healing and peace. We remember, too, people who have lost loved-ones during the past two years, both because of COVID19 and for other reasons, many of whom have been unable either to mark their passing or to mourn because of restrictions at funerals. We pray for neighbours who are suffering from the physical, mental, social and economic effects of the pandemic and, not least of all, for children whose education and general wellbeing have been seriously harmed during the pandemic.

In a time of silence, we bring to mind people around us who are in special need of your care and, as we name them before you, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out to them in loving-kindness..... Lord, wherever possible, help us to offer them practical support and friendship and we ask you to embrace everybody for whom we pray with the warmth of your love, offering them healing, courage, comfort and lasting peace.

Holy God, we pray not only for our Circuit and other churches in our district, but also the World Church. As we emerge from the dark shadow of coronavirus, help us learn new, effective ways of meeting the needs of our communities, ways that reflect the goodness and grace of Jesus as we serve him with united, faithful hearts. Abba, Father God, may the news that neither sin nor death has the final word inspire us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to reveal the light of your love in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, our risen Lord, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore.

Amen.

Reading: Luke 24:13 – 35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Our penultimate hymn was written by Marty Haugen, who was raised in the American Lutheran Church, yet found his first job as a church musician in a Roman Catholic parish. Finding a vocation in that parish to provide accessible songs for worship, he continued to compose hymns for the Evangelical Lutheran Church and he is composer-in-residence at Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis.

StF 308 – On the journey to Emmaus

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| 1) On the journey to Emmaus with our hearts
cold as stone -
The One who would save us had left us alone.
Then a stranger walks with us and,
to our surprise,
He opens our stories and he opens our eyes. | 3) And that evening at the table as he blessed
and broke bread,
We saw it was Jesus arisen from the dead;
Though he vanished before us we knew
he was near -
The life in our dying and the hope in our fear. |
| 2) And our hearts burned within us as
we talked on the way,
How all that was promised was ours on that day.
So we begged him, 'Stay with us and
grant us your word.'
We welcomed the stranger and
we welcomed the Lord. | 4) On our journey to Emmaus, in our stories
and feast,
With Jesus we claim that the greatest is least:
And his words burn within us - let none
be ignored -
Who welcomes the stranger shall
welcome the Lord. |

Marty Haugen © 1995 GIA Publications CCL No. 515642

Sermon

Shabbat shalom Chaverim! Let me introduce myself. I am Cleopas, not one of the twelve, but nevertheless a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. My wife, Mary, and I had gone with the Master and his friends to celebrate Pessach in Jerusalem and watched him ride in to the adulation of a large crowd, many of whom were fellow Galileans. We'd heard and seen him teach and heal, but when he raised his friend, Lazarus, four days after death we agreed with Peter that Jesus is the Messiah. Thus both Mary and I expected the Lord to raise a revolution to destroy the power of occupying Romans, to reunite Israel and Judea, and restore the country to the level of wealth and political power it had enjoyed when David was King. We'd anticipated the Messiah would have made Jews honour a new covenant with God, but for many of us at that time salvation meant freedom from occupation, gaining power and wealth more than personal holiness.

What actually occurred had left us inconsolable. To our surprise, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a young donkey, like the King of peace in Zechariah, rather than on a war horse. Within a week, the Master had been betrayed by that zealot, Judas, abandoned by his disciples and those cries of 'Hosanna!' changed to 'Crucify him!' Certainly none of us envisaged Jesus submitting to his enemies like a lamb to slaughter. My Mary had joined other women at the crucifixion, but none of us men did, except for John. We'd hidden in the same barred room, terrified of being discovered and sharing the Master's fate.

Imagine our feelings on the morning after the Sabbath ended, when our women went to finish anointing Jesus' body according to our customs. Soon afterwards, Mary Magdalene returned, crying that Jesus' body had been taken from the tomb, so Peter and John ran to investigate, but had returned only confirming that the tomb was empty. Later Mary Magdalene had reappeared shouting, 'The Lord is risen!' and the other women including my Mary affirmed this report. Some of the disciples told Mary that her demons had returned and blamed the women for being foolish. Of course none of us believed the women's news of the Master's resurrection, so, imagine how poisonous the atmosphere became in that room, unbearable enough for us to want to leave for home, whatever the risk.

As we plodded along, despondent that what had begun as a great adventure had ended in ashes of hopelessness: the Messiah killed as a common criminal; neither revolution nor salvation had happened and, to cap it all, his body had disappeared from the tomb! Now Emmaus is 20 stadia or 7 miles north west of Jerusalem, so we'd considerable time to try to make sense of events, but as we walked and talked, we were overtaken by a figure who asked what we were discussing. We were utterly amazed, for Jesus' crucifixion had been the talk of Jerusalem for the past three days.

When we told him, the stranger gently rebuked us: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" He went on to explain how prophets had pointed to how God's salvation would come through Jesus. By the time we reached our home, it was nearly sunset, but we'd clearly so enjoyed the stranger's conversation we offered him hospitality at our house, rather have him travel in the dark. Even then we didn't recognise him until he broke bread and blessed it – as we had asked him to do as so learned a guest. The way in which he did it revealed him to us as the risen Lord, yet in the time it took us to glance at one another, Jesus had vanished, leaving us to reflect upon what had happened, how our hearts were strangely warmed as the mystery of the cross was revealed to us. Forgetting the hour, the darkness and risks we were taking, we returned at once to Jerusalem, only to be told Jesus had appeared to Peter. Oy, our sore feet! Was it an anti-climax? No, chaverim, it confirmed the Master has been raised according to the scriptures.

What message does this encounter on the Emmaus Road hold for us? Just as Mary recognised the risen Christ when she was called by name, so we realised his identity when Jesus performed a familiar action – it reminded us of his eucharistic command. In other words, we can and do encounter Jesus in mundane situations – they don't need to be mountain-top meetings, or Damascus Road experiences. We can meet the Lord in other people, too, when we give or receive help, share communion, or pray. Remember, when we see Christ in strangers, like Mary and me, our hearts will be warmed with his love. Thus the apparent defeat of Jesus at Calvary became his great victory over evil's power in the world. It means that, even when situations seem hopeless, they're not beyond God's reach in Jesus, for resurrection means Jesus has triumphed over sin and the Last Enemy, death. God has the last word: he's triumphed and will continue to do so; Jesus' blood has united us with God as his children, his holy priesthood. God's generous love invites us to follow him; it does not coerce us.

By God's grace we've been freed from the burden of sin to serve God as our loving response, not because we have to earn salvation. When we realised the significance of Jesus' resurrection, we returned at once, though it was dark, to joyfully share the Good News with the other disciples. Do you recognise risen the Lord in your daily life? Do you answer Christ's call to share Good News in both deeds and words? May we have the faith to persevere, even when all seems lost, for as with Mary and me, the risen Christ walks with us on our life journey and he won't let us down. Alleluia! What a Saviour! Shabbat Shalom! Amen.

We shall close our worship as we sing a hymn by Brian Wren, a Minister in the Congregational Church before it merged to form the URC. It was first sung at Hockley Congregational Church, Essex, on Easter Day 1968 and is as relevant now as it was more than half a century ago.

StF 297 – Christ is alive!

- 1) Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;
His cross stands empty to the sky:
Let streets and homes with praises ring;
Love drowned in death, shall never die.
- 2) Christ is alive! No longer bound
To distant years in Palestine,
But saving, healing, here and now,
And touching every place and time.
- 3) In every insult, rift and war,
Where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
And lives, where even hope has died.
- 4) Women and men, in age and youth,
Can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
And find the way, the life, the truth,
Revealed in Jesus, freed for all.
- 5) Christ is alive and comes to bring
Good news to this and every age,
Till earth and sky and ocean ring
With joy, with justice, love, and praise.

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Benediction

Heavenly Father, in whose power our Saviour Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life and to bring you honour by sharing the love you shower upon us in abundance with everybody we meet. And the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. **Amen.**