

31st March – Morning Service

Easter Sunday

Rev Chris Watson

Lent Liturgy - Flowers

John 20: 1-18: The Empty Tomb

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Lord Jesus, our long, dark walk through Lent is finished. This new day is bathed in your resurrection light! Thanks be to God. **Amen.** Take a moment to pray that the joy of Jesus' resurrection life will be made known to all and for breakthrough and transformation in situations and systems which seem beyond hope. Risen Lord Jesus, may we live in the knowledge and reality of Easter as we spend our lives loving you – for yours is the victory, the sovereignty, the power and the glory forever and ever, and there is nothing, and no-one, that you cannot reach and redeem. **Amen.**

Call to Worship

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Let us celebrate with Easter joy! Not out of habit. Not thinking only about chocolate and fun, but with a brand-new awareness of Christ's presence with us as our loving and risen Lord!

Lord of the Church, Lord of our lives, and Lord of the world:

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

On this glorious Easter morning, united with God's people everywhere, we join in our first hymn to declare and celebrate the world-changing resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

StF 313 – Thine be the glory

- 1) 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:
- 2) 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:
- Ch) *Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*
- 3) No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life;
Life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife;
Make us more than conquerors through
thy deathless love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to
thy home above:

Edmond Budry

Prayers

Loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we praise you this morning for all that you are, and all that you have done. We thank you for coming to us in Jesus Christ, and for Jesus' willingness to journey to the Cross for us. We cannot fully comprehend your suffering or sacrifice, but we give thanks for amazing grace, and we celebrate his glorious resurrection.

Through Jesus, we can be in no doubt of your love for us.
Through Jesus, we receive your forgiveness and mercy.
Through Jesus, there is victory over sin and death.
Through Jesus, we are adopted into your family.
Through Jesus, we can be filled with your transforming Spirit.
Through Jesus, there is hope.

Forgive us, Lord, when we forget all that you have done, or fail to live differently in light of your good news. Breathe your living Spirit into our hearts today, that we might not only hear, but respond to your life-changing hope. In Jesus' name, **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.**

StF 317 – At the name of Jesus

- 1) At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should
call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.
- 2) Humbled for a season, to receive a name
From the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
Faithfully he bore it, spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious
when from death he passed:
- 3) Bore it up triumphant, with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures to the central height,
To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.
- 4) In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
All that is not holy, all that is not true;
Crown him as your captain in temptation's hour:
Let his will enfold you in its light and power.
- 5) For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,
With his Father's glory, with his angel train;
All the wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
And our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel

A Meditation from the vantage point of Mary Magdalene – from Rootsontheweb

'Risen from the dead? Don't be ridiculous, woman!'

That was what the disciples said when we gave them the wonderful news.

We tried to explain, to make them see, to persuade them to go and look for themselves.

And they did in the end, but at first they wouldn't believe, just as we didn't believe when we arrived at the tomb to find the stone rolled away.

We'd gone to the garden very early, as soon as the dawn had begun to break, taking the spices and perfumes we'd carefully prepared before the Sabbath had begun.

We walked in silence, each of us lost in our own thoughts, still reeling from Jesus' death.

We were speechless when we saw the stone moved and the tomb empty.

Two men were standing there, we were very frightened and we fell to our knees with fear.

'What had happened?' 'Where was Jesus?' 'Who were these people?'

Questions we would have asked, had we the courage.

Then the men spoke to us, 'Why are you looking for the Living One in a tomb? He is not here, he has risen!'

And we remembered Jesus' words, words that had faded from our minds as the events of three days ago took over.

'The Son of Man must be handed over and be crucified, and three days later he will rise to life.'

We all began talking at once, 'Could it be true?' 'Was it possible?'

We hardly dare imagine that it might be.

We hurried back and found the disciples gathered together in the one room, discussing all that had happened, talking about a future without Jesus.

Once they dismissed our news as nonsense, we began to leave, but Peter, who had gone off to look for himself, returned.

'The tomb is empty,' he told the others,

'The linen wrappings are there, but Jesus is gone.

'This can only mean one thing,' he said, 'and I hardly dare say it, Jesus must be alive!'

'It's all true, every word he said to us is true!'

StF 309 – See what a morning!

- 1) See, what a morning, gloriously bright,
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the graveclothes, tomb filled with light,
As the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan,
Wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man,
For he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!
- 2) See Mary weeping, 'Where is he laid?'
As in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name;
It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years,
Speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us,
Will sound till he appears,
For he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!
- 3) One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
Through the Spirit who clothes faith
with certainty;
Honour and blessing, glory and praise
To the King crowned with power and authority!
And we are raised with him,
Death is dead, love has won,
Christ has conquered;
And we shall reign with him,
For he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!

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Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Sermon

What a week! Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, the most important week in the Christian year. On Palm Sunday we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem in triumph, to cries of Hosanna, by the end of the week he is betrayed and the cries turn from 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify'. Why?

I am reminded of the words of the hymn, 'My song is love unknown' by Samuel Crossman. Verse three says, '*Sometimes they strew his way, and his sweet praises sing; resounding all the day hosannas to their King. Then Crucify! Is all their breath, and for his death they thirst and cry.*' Verse four says, '*Why, what has my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run, he gave the blind their sight. Sweet injuries!*'

The problem was though that Jesus did far more than that, he challenged the authorities, he challenged the ones in power and gave a voice to those who had no voice. He was a problem for many. Jesus was born in an agricultural society where the peasants worked the land and the ruling elite claimed the produce through taxes and levies. Some of the taxes were on the land, some on the actual people who worked the land. Failure to pay the dues resulted in serfdom.

The taxes were paid to the Temple and to the state or the Romans. The Temple was no longer regarded as a house of God but as part and parcel of the oppression. The High Priests, who should have been representing the people to God and God to the people, were appointed by Rome's puppet ruler, Herod, who gave the position in return for support of his rule. The incumbent was changed on a regular basis to prevent too much power and influence being held.

Jesus came and questioned the taxes, the oppression, the system and he taught that it was right to do so. The representatives of the Temple system and the Romans did not take kindly to this and were determined to get rid of this threat to their hold on power.

The week between Palm Sunday and Easter Day were the culmination of months of plotting and scheming, of attempts to discredit Jesus by a series of challenges and questions all of which Jesus had overturned. They could not silence him by discrediting him with the people and his popularity kept growing. In the last week Jesus went to Jerusalem, the very seat of power. He came out of the shadows, out of the villages and even into the Temple itself, overturning tables, making sure that the rulers knew he was there. He issued a direct challenge.

The answer to Samuel Crossman's question 'What has my Lord done?' is there. Jesus challenged what he saw was wrong. He challenged injustices but more than that he showed us all a better way to live. He showed us a different Kingdom with different rules and different challenges. A kingdom which reflects the character of the King; a kingdom of love, justice, equality, a kingdom where the first is last and the ruler is a Servant King.

StF 277 – My song is love unknown

- 1) My song is love unknown,
My Saviour's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown,
That they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake
My Lord should take frail flesh and die?
- 2) He came from his blest throne,
Salvation to bestow;
But they made strange, and none
The longed-for Christ would know.
But O my Friend, my Friend indeed,
Who at my need His life did spend!
- 3) Sometimes they strew his way,
And his sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King.
Then 'Crucify!' is all their breath,
And for his death yhey thirst and cry.
- 4) Why, what hath my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
He gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these
Themselves displease, and 'gainst him rise.
- 5) They rise, and needs will have
My dear Lord made away;
A murderer they save,
The Prince of Life they slay.
Yet cheerful he to suffering goes,
That he his foes from thence might free.
- 6) In life no house, no home.
My Lord on earth might have;
In death no friendly tomb
But what a stranger gave.
What may I say? Heaven was his home;
But mine the tomb wherein he lay.
- 7) Here might I stay and sing,
No story so divine:
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like thine!
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

Samuel Crossman

Prayers of Concern

Resurrecting God, we pray for your resurrection power to be at work in your Church today. Remind us that you have adopted us into your family; you turn our grief into eternal joy; and you send us to proclaim your good news to all the earth. May we, like Mary Magdalene, be obedient and proclaim, in word and deed, the truth that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Give us your boldness, and may your love, joy, and hope flow from us.

We pray now for those who need your resurrection power and hope in their lives today...

...those who are grieving the loss of loved ones...[*Silence*]

...those struggling with poor physical and mental health...[*Silence*]

...those facing personal battles with addictions...[*Silence*]

...those trapped in poverty and systems of injustice...[*Silence*]

May they know your presence, receive your hope, and be touched by your joy. **Amen**

StF 295 – Alleluia, Alleluia

Ch) Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his name.

1) Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
He is the King of creation:

2) Spread the good news o'er all the earth:
Jesus has died and has risen:

3) We have been crucified with Christ;
Now we shall live for ever:

4) God has proclaimed the just reward:
New life for all! Alleluia!

5) Come, let us praise the living God,
Joyfully sing to our Saviour:

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Blessing

Gracious God, in Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing. We are chosen, made holy, and adopted into your family through his death and resurrection. We receive the priceless gifts of your love, joy and hope. From this place of blessing, may we overflow to bless others, for the sake of your kingdom and your glory. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Spirit, be with us all today and evermore. **Amen.**