

**A service for 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2022 (StF) Easter 3**

**Call to Worship: Psalm 30 verses 11 and 12**

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks for ever. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend after they had been introduced at a worship conference in 2000. Keith sent Stuart a CD with some of his new melodies, the first of which inspired Stuart to write the words of one of our best worship songs. The line, 'The wrath of God was satisfied' in verse two caused controversy, as a result of which some hymnals have changed the line without permission. However, God's wrath was not directed at Jesus, but at sin. We should remember that, whilst God loves us to the uttermost, he finds sin abominable which is why we ought never to take it lightly! With no more ado, we shall sing hymn number 351, 'In Christ alone, my hope is found'.*

**1. In Christ alone my hope is found,  
He is my light, my strength, my song.  
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease.  
My Comforter, my All in all,  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.**

**2. In Christ alone, who took on flesh;  
Fullness of God in helpless babe.  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones he came to save,  
Till on that cross as Jesus died  
The wrath of God was satisfied.  
For every sin on him was laid,  
Here in the death of Christ I live.**

**3. There in the ground his body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain:  
Then bursting forth in glorious day,  
Up from the grave he rose again.  
And as he stands in victory,  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am his and he is mine,  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.**

**4. No guilt in life; no fear in death –  
This is the power of Christ in me.  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, or scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from his hand,  
Till he returns, or calls me home,  
Here in power of Christ I'll stand.**

© Stuart Townend & Keith Getty

**Let us pray.**

Glorious heavenly Father, we have come here to celebrate the victory of our Saviour Jesus Christ over sin and death for the sake of all peoples. 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 Christ, 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, so like Christians everywhere, we joyfully proclaim, 'Christ is risen! Alleluia!'

Loving heavenly Father, we ask you to accept our wholehearted thanks for this beautiful, 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 a terrible cost, the death of our Saviour. Take away our anxieties and distractions, so we may offer you our worship in spirit, love and truth in the name of our risen Lord Jesus, Amen.

***Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing and seeking forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.***

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

Lord, in your mercy ..... **Hear our prayer.**

We know that, whilst you love sinners like us, sin itself angers and grieves you, so we ask you to help us turn away from wrongdoing and back to the path you call us to walk. 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.

Lord, in your mercy..... **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 Christ Jesus as his disciples, freed from the burden of guilt. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives provide evidence of our faith and may we be a beacon to draw others to know and love our risen Saviour. Amen.

***We shall say 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.**

***Philipp Bliss was born in Pennsylvania in 1838. He came from a family of devoted Methodists and was one himself until he settled in Chicago and became a member of a newly-formed Congregational church. Philipp possessed a fine baritone voice and, shortly after he had met Messrs. Moody and Sankey, he was invited to share in the solos at revivalist meetings, presumably giving Ira Sankey a little rest! By the time he was thirty-two, Philipp Bliss was much sought after as a soloist.***

***Whilst he was still a young man, Philipp sent a manuscript to a Chicago publisher, George F. Root. He attached a note bearing this message: 'If my song is worth publishing, I would appreciate having a flute in exchange for it.' Mr. Root was so impressed that not only did he send Philipp the best flute he could buy***

*in Chicago, he also gave him a job at his firm, Root & Cady! During the next few years, Philipp edited a number of gospel song books, one of which earned him \$300000. Typically, he gave the sum to charity. We shall sing hymn number 361, 'Man of Sorrows! What a name'.*

**1. Man of Sorrows! What a name**

**For the Son of God, who came**

**Ruined sinners to reclaim!**

**Alleluia! What a Saviour!**

**2. Bearing shame and scoffing rude,**

**In my place condemned he stood;**

**Sealed my pardon with his blood:**

**Alleluia! What a Saviour!**

**3. Guilty, vile, and helpless we;**

**Spotless Lamb of God was he:**

**Full atonement – can it be?**

**Alleluia! What a Saviour!**

**4. Lifted up was he to die;**

**'It is finished!' was his cry;**

**Now in heaven exalted high:**

**Alleluia! What a Saviour!**

**5. When he comes, our glorious King,**

**All his ransomed home to bring,**

**Then anew this song we'll sing,**

**Alleluia! What a Saviour!**

© P.P. Bliss {1838 – 1876}

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

Lord of all nations, we believe Jesus Christ died for all people at Calvary to fulfil the new eternal covenant and to draw us close as your earthly children. However, our failure to live in peace with our neighbours is heart-breaking, especially as we witness the suffering of Ukraine as the country faces intensive attacks by Russia.

We pray that a peace treaty can soon be negotiated to end the conflict, that, if it is your will, the Kremlin's plans are frustrated and those who have committed war-crimes will face justice. We ask that Ukraine will be able to 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 after the war has ended, for as long as help is needed.

In your mercy Lord, reach out to the Ukrainian people. Grant President Zelenskyy and his advisors the wisdom, courage and judgment needed to lead the people throughout and beyond the conflict. We pray for the armed forces and militia that they will remain courageous and undaunted and that they will be given the means to resist Russia's might. Loving God, our hearts bleed for Ukrainian civilians, mainly women children, the elderly and disabled, who have to shelter from bombardment in appalling conditions and privation: gather them in your care 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, when

peace is restored to Ukraine, may it receive help to rebuild what war has destroyed, in the name of our risen Lord. 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 which 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, we pray for peace across the world and not just peace in Ukraine. Inspire national leaders to resolve disputes by negotiation and compromise, rather than resorting to military action. Indeed, may they learn to rule with justice and mercy, for only then can true peace be established and prevail. In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayer for all victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. Grant all of them the help, resources and encouragement they need to be healed in body, mind and spirit and to face the future with hope.

May the situation in Ukraine not divert the attention of governments and relief agencies from providing much-needed aid to famine-stricken countries like Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen, so millions can be saved from starvation.

Lord of healing, we pray for who are sick, infirm, troubled or lonely and particularly all who live with a dementia, their families and carers. We especially remember those whose conditions have deteriorated during the past two years because of the restriction to treatment during the pandemic. May they receive the help and support they need to be returned to health and reach out to them in mercy, offering comfort, renewed strength, hope, healing and peace in their time of need.

We remember, too, all who have lost loved-ones during the past two years, not only because of COVID19, but for other reasons, too, for they will 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, 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 which offers them healing, courage, comfort and lasting peace.

Holy God, we pray not only for our church and other churches in our district, but the World Church. Unite us in spirit, love and truth 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, our risen Lord.

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 to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is John chapter 21 verses 1 to 19**

After this, Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at Lake Tiberias. This is how it happened. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (the one from Cana in

Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of Jesus were all together.

Simon Peter said to the others,

“I am going fishing.”

“We will come with you,” they told him. So they went out in a boat, but all that night they did not catch a thing. As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water’s edge, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then he asked them,

“Young men, haven’t you caught anything?”

“Not a thing,” they answered.

He said to them,

“Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, and you will catch some.” So they threw the net out and could not pull it back in, because they had caught so many fish.

The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter,

“It is the Lord!” When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken his clothes off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples came to shore in the boat, pulling the net full of fish. They were not very far from land, about a hundred metres away. When they stepped ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it and some bread. Then Jesus said to them,

“Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”

Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore full of big fish, 153 in all; even though there were so many, still the net did not tear. Jesus said to them,

“Come and eat.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. So Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them; he did the same with the fish. This, then, was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from death.

After they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter,

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said to him,

“Take care of my lambs.” A second time Jesus said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Take care of my sheep.” A third time Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was sad because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” so he said to him,

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!”

Jesus said to him,

“Take care of my sheep. I am telling you the truth: when you were young, you used to get ready and go anywhere you wanted to; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will bind you and take you where you don’t want to go.” (In saying this, Jesus was indicating the way in which Peter would die and bring glory to God.) Then Jesus said to him, “Follow me!” Amen.

*‘Mine is an unchanging love, / Higher than the heights above, / Deeper than the depths beneath, / Free and faithful, strong as death.’ We continue our worship as we sing a hymn by a deeply-troubled, bipolar poet, William Cowper, who was supported by Revd. John Newton, the ex-slave trader and author of “Amazing grace”. Hymn number 426, ‘Hark, my soul! It is the Lord;’*

**1. Hark, my soul! It is the Lord;**

**'Tis thy Saviour, hear his word;  
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee:  
'Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me?'**

**2. 'I delivered thee when bound,  
And, when bleeding, healed thy wound;  
Sought thee wandering, set thee right,  
Turned thy darkness into light.**

**3. 'Can a woman's tender care  
Cease toward the child she bare?  
Yes, she may forgetful be,  
Yet will I remember thee.**

**4. Mine is an unchanging love,  
Higher than the heights above,  
Deeper than the depths beneath,  
Free and faithful, strong as death.**

**5. Thou shalt see my glory soon,  
When the work of grace is done;  
Partner of my throne shalt be;  
Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me?'**

**6. Lord, it is my chief complaint  
That my love is weak and faint;  
Yet I love thee, and adore;  
O for grace to love thee more!**

© William Cowper (1731 – 1800)

**Sermon: '... do you truly love me more than these?' John 21:15b**

The resurrection of Jesus posed a serious problem for Simon Peter, for while he was undoubtedly amazed and delighted that his Master had been raised from death, he realised that his relationship with Christ had been jeopardised on the night of Jesus' arrest, when he'd denied even knowing him on three separate occasions. Worse still, only shortly before, at the Last Supper, he had boasted that he would never let him down and Jesus had predicted what would – and did – happen. Clearly, nothing was said on the two occasions mentioned in the resurrection accounts, when the newly-risen Jesus appeared inside the bolted room in John's gospel and showed his followers the wounds of crucifixion. However, Peter must have thought that his chances of remaining a disciple had ended with his denials of Jesus, let alone being their leader. After all, how could somebody who'd let the Lord down so publicly be trusted again? Therefore, it is little wonder that Peter was apprehensive of his future.

You may wonder why, in today's reading, the disciples were not in Jerusalem, shouting the good news that Jesus had been raised from the tomb. After all, two weeks earlier, Mary Magdalene had returned from the graveyard, crying that Christ's tomb was empty. John and Peter ran to see what had happened, entered the tomb and saw that the burial clothes had been folded neatly, so they knew that neither grave-robbers, nor anyone from the Sanhedrin would have taken such trouble. No, they must have realised that what the Lord had told them had come true: he had indeed been raised from death. Why didn't they return to the house declaring that Jesus was risen? Were they afraid to speak out and face disbelief from the other disciples? Was Peter too conflicted with the likelihood of having to face the risen Lord and explain his denials?

Even when Mary Magdalene returned once more, crying out, **'Jesus is risen! I have seen him!'** disciples clearly disbelieved her, thought she was imagining things, or was deluded because of her grief. That evening, as the people in that bolted room ate, Jesus appeared and spoke to them briefly, but there is no record of Peter talking to him. A week later, Christ appeared in that room again, but John wrote that he was there to provide physical evidence of resurrection to Thomas. Even so, the disciples' joy soon died, for they returned to Galilee without making any fuss, possibly feeling demoralised. They knew they had all deserted Jesus in his hour of need, so surely, they could have no further part in his kingdom? Certainly, Peter must have believed he had thrown away any chance to lead them because of his weakness in the courtyard of Caiaphas' palace. How could he possibly lead others, let alone be the Rock on which Christ would build his Church when he didn't even respect himself.

So they had returned to Galilee, where the women said Jesus had said he would meet them. Nothing happened for days: they probably grew bored, so they decided to return to their former life as fishermen. After all, it was better than just grumbling to one another! It was strange how the Master met them at daybreak after they had caught nothing. He was just a silhouette against the eastern sky when he told them where to cast their net. They would have done so more to humour this unknown stranger than in expectation of catching anything. It was amazing! The weight of their catch almost pulled the boat over. When John realised who the stranger on the shore was, he exclaimed, **'It's the Lord!'**

Almost before he had time to think, Peter was splashing his way to the shore to greet him. Peter forgot his fear, but all Jesus said was, **'Come and have breakfast with me.'** He pointed and the disciples saw that he had already baked some bread and fish, so it didn't take long for them to cook some of the fish they had caught to add to the meal.

After they had breakfasted, Jesus took Peter aside and asked him, **'Simon. Son of John, do you love me more than these?'** Peter's heart must have felt like breaking when he called him **Simon**, because the formal address made it seem as if Christ had already abandoned any idea of Peter being the foundation stone of his Church. Worse still, he spoke to Peter in **Greek**, which had three words we translate as love and which was in common use. The word he used for love was **'agapeo', which means boundless, sacrificial, God-like love.** How could Peter say he did after he had denied knowing Jesus three times? He replied, **'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you'**, but he used another word for love, **'philos', which really means I am your friend, but does not mean I love you with all my heart, mind and soul.** Jesus simply replied, **'Feed my lambs'.**

Again, the Lord repeated the same question, using **'agapeo'**. Peter would have really wanted to say **'yes'**, but he knew he was unworthy to do so. Therefore, he said, **'Yes, Lord, you know that I am your friend.'** Once more Christ said, **'Feed my lambs'**, before he looked Peter in the eye and asked, **"Simon son of John do you love me?"** This time he used **'philos'**, the same word Peter had used in his reply. **It meant that what he was actually asking was did Peter even like him as a friend.** This time, Peter almost wept as he exclaimed, **'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!'** For the first time Jesus relaxed and Peter realised that he had made him confess that he was really his friend as many times as he had denied being so. Peter realised that Jesus had forgiven him long before, but knew that Peter had to forgive himself, too.

This time, Jesus told Peter that he would not only lead the Church, but that he would remain resolute in future and not let him down again, even though it would ultimately lead to his death. Peter knew that out of the ashes of failure and denial, Jesus had raised him so that he could have a fresh start, forgiven and free to serve. Indeed, on that Pentecost, in the power of the Holy Spirit, with all doubts dispelled, Peter preached boldly and more than three thousand listeners turned to Christ as their Saviour. Not bad for your first sermon!

I believe that Christ will do the same for everyone who has failed, even as grievously as Peter, but who is willing to try again. I am convinced that **agape**, the love of Jesus, does not keep score of wrongdoing, nor failure. Christ will offer us new life in him, if we acknowledge our weakness, if we declare our love for him, with all our human limitations and if we put our trust in his grace and goodness. I know, too, that we can do little in our own strength, but if we work in the power of his gift, the Holy Spirit, we can amaze even ourselves by what he enables us to achieve, provided we are working for Christ's glory and not our own. **Jesus said, "Follow me," and Peter did, just as he was. He calls us to follow. How deep is our love for Jesus after all he has done for us? Are we willing to put ourselves in his hands, let him take control of our heart and answer his call? May we reply, 'Yes!' Amen.**

*We close our worship with a hymn by Revd. Samuel Medley, an Eighteenth Century Pastor at Byrom Street Baptist Church in Liverpool, who like John Newton, had been an unbelieving sailor, but who was brought to faith by his grandfather, who nursed him back to health when Samuel had been wounded in battle. This hymn makes one of the greatest statements of faith at Easter. Let us sing hymn number 303, 'I know that my Redeemer lives'.*

**1. I know that my Redeemer lives –  
What joy the blest assurance gives!  
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;  
He lives, my everlasting Head.**

**2. He lives to bless me with his love;  
He lives, to plead for me above;  
He lives, my hungry soul to feed;  
He lives, to help in time of need.**

**3. He lives and grants me daily breath;  
He lives, and I shall conquer death;  
He lives, my mansion to prepare;  
He lives, to lead me safely there.**

**4. He lives, all glory to his name;  
He lives, my Saviour, still the same;  
What joy the blest assurance gives,  
I know that my Redeemer lives!**

© Samuel Medley {1738 – 1799}

### ***Benediction***

Heavenly Father, by whose glory our Saviour Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life; and may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. **Amen.**