

A service for 4th May, 2025 Easter 3 (StF)

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 in 1851 by Revd. Matthew Bridges, who followed John Newman into the Roman Catholic Church three years before he wrote this hymn. Revd. H. W. Hutton objected to some parts of the hymn, so some verses of a hymn by Geoffrey Thring, Rector of Alford in Somerset were substituted – verses 2 and 3 in its current form. We shall sing hymn number 347, ‘Crown him with many crowns’.

**1. Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own.**

**Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king
through all eternity.**

**2. Crown him the Son of God,
before the worlds began;
and ye who tread where he has trod,
crown him the Son of Man,
who every grief has known
that wrings the human breast,
and takes and bears them for his own,
that all in him may rest.**

**3. Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save.
His glories now we sing,
who died and rose on high;
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives, that death may die.**

**4. Crown him the Lord of peace,
whose power a sceptre sways
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,
absorbed in prayer and praise.
His reign shall know no end,
and round his pierced feet
fair flowers of paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.**

**5. Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side –
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified.**

**All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise and glory shall not fail
throughout eternity.**

© Matthew Bridges (1800 – 1894) © Godfrey Thring (1823 – 1903)

Let us pray.

God of grace and glory, 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, not only bringing Good News in words and deeds of love, but atoning for the sins of the whole world at Calvary. Our risen Lord offers us everlasting life through his grace, not by anything we deserve or can do to earn it.

We ask you to accept our wholehearted thanks for this 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 being willing to redeem us at such a 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 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.

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.

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. 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.

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. Philipp so impressed George F. Root with his humility and faith, he 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 to our prayers of intercession, for neighbours nearby and far afield. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, while we rejoice in the hope that the resurrection gives us, we grieve at the current brokenness of the world, much of which is the result of our foolishness, pride, avarice, spitefulness, selfishness and indifference to your call to live as you want us to. We recognize your grace and goodness, so we pray you will help us to play what part we can to make this world a better place. Where what we have to offer is not enough, warm the hearts of people who can play their part in healing this broken world.

Jesus came as Lord of shalom, yet we hear of wars being waged in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Myanmar, Congo, Somalia and Sudan with all the suffering, destruction, death and displacement that follows. Teach the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise, rather than taking up arms when disputes arise. Enable just and lasting settlements to the conflicts we have named and help us to stand up for justice for all-comers and not turn a blind eye to evil.

Jesus is the source of healing and well-being, so we pray for people who are ill, for those brought low by loneliness, fear or need and for all who are experiencing the pain of bereavement. In a time of silence, we bring to mind friends and neighbours for whom we are especially concerned

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Loving Lord, help us offer them practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be healed, encouraged and granted reassurance.

Saviour God, hear our prayer for this church, churches in our Circuit and indeed the World Church. May the light of Jesus’ love guide us through the darkness of this increasingly secular, materialist world and may we remain constant and true, despite our fears. Unite us in love and purpose and help us proclaim good news boldly to a world that needs good news so much.

Abba, Father God, may the risen Lord 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.

We continue our worship as we sing a hymn by a deeply-troubled, bipolar poet, William Cowper, who was supported in his illness by John Newton, the ex-slave trader and author of “Amazing grace”. Together, they produced “Olney Hymns”

in 1779 in attempt to rival Wesley's hymnals. It did not quite succeed, but it contains some lovely works, nevertheless, including the one we are about to sing. 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

Although the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke mention Peter's three denials of knowing Jesus, when he was challenged in the courtyard of Caiaphas' palace, none of them deals with Peter's restitution. Only John, the last gospel to have been written, deals with the thorny question of how Peter and the risen Christ were reconciled. In Luke, Cleopas and his companion encountered the risen Lord at Emmaus and raced back to Jerusalem with the good news, only to find that Jesus had appeared to Peter. There was no fly-on-the-wall account of what was said. Last week we had the appearance of Jesus to the disciples, notably to Thomas, who wanted concrete proof of the resurrection.

Today's account occurred sometime after the resurrection, as the disciples had returned to Galilee, at the women's behest, to wait for Christ. We don't know how long they had been there, but it was long enough for Peter to grow bored and decide he would go fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Other disciples agreed to accompany him and, as usual, they fished at night, using a lamp to lure the fish towards their net. Unlike Thomas, Peter had no doubt about the resurrection: the folded shroud, or tallit and folded face-covering made it almost certain that neither Caiaphas' agents nor grave-robbers were behind the disappearance of the Lord's body. However, instead of being elated, Peter must have been both terrified and guilt-ridden. Hours before Jesus' betrayal Peter had boasted that, even if the others deserted Jesus, he would remain

true and die with him. In the event, he denied even knowing his Master. Far from being the Rock on which Christ would build his Church, Peter must have felt he had forfeited membership of the disciples, let alone remaining their leader. Even though he knew that the others had deserted Jesus in his hour of need and had been very slow to believe in his resurrection, Peter was demoralized and afraid of Christ's judgment. He had no expectation of being allowed to have any part in the Kingdom.

It was significant that Jesus met the disciples at daybreak, as he had met Mary Magdalene on the day of resurrection. He was just a silhouette against the eastern sky, but unlike Mary, they did not recognize his voice either when he asked them if they had caught anything, then told them where to cast their net. They probably obeyed more to humour him than in expectation of catching anything. Suddenly, the weight of their catch almost pulled the boat over. John was the first to realize who the stranger was and he exclaimed, **'It's the Lord!'** Despite his awareness of his failure as a disciple, Peter pulled on his coat and splashed his way to shore to greet Jesus, his love for the Lord overcoming fears of rejection. Jesus had already baked some fish and bread, but he called for Peter to fetch some more fish which he did as the other disciples came ashore. This huge catch of fish echoes Luke's account of the calling of the first disciples which ended with the Lord's declaration that they would become 'fishers of people' rather than fishermen, with the size of the catch representing the explosive growth of the Church. The question of who would lead that church remained unanswered and Peter would not have expected that he'd have any part in it.

After they had breakfasted, Jesus took Peter aside and asked him, **'Simon. Son of John, do you love me more than these?'** His use of Simon, rather than Peter, must have been heart-breaking, because it suggested he had already abandoned any idea of Peter being the foundation stone of his Church. Worse still, he spoke to me in **Greek**, which was the common language. 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 him three times? So Peter 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, Jesus repeated the same question, using **'agapeo'**. Although he really wanted to say **'yes'**, Peter knew that he was unworthy to do so. Therefore, he said, **'Yes, Lord, you know that I am your friend.'** Once more Jesus said, **'Feed my lambs'**, before he asked for the third time, **"Simon son of John do you love me?"** This time he used **'philos'**, the same word Peter had used in his replies. **It meant that what the Lord was actually asking was did Peter even like him as a friend.** This time, Peter exclaimed, **'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!'** There was no boastfulness, nor complacency, for Peter realised that there were to be no limitations to his love and commitment in future Jesus is God in man and the **Shema commands that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul and with all our strength.** Peter realised that the Lord had made him confess that he was really his friend as many times as I had denied being so. Peter probably realised that Christ had forgiven him long before, but knew that he had to forgive himself, too.

After Peter's third answer Jesus told him 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 Peter's death. Peter's will would take second place to his calling with Christ at its heart. Out of the ashes of failure and denial, Jesus had raised Peter so that he could have a fresh start, forgiven and free to serve. I believe that he

will do the same for everyone, probably all of us, who has failed but who is willing to try again. **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. We need to recognize, 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 she enables us to achieve, provided we are working for Christ's glory and not our own. **Jesus said, "Follow me," and Peter did. He calls you to follow. Will you put yourselves in his hands, let him take control of your heart and answer his call? 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.**