

A service for 12th April, 2026 (Low Sunday) {StF}

Call to worship: Psalm 118 vs. 24, 28 & 29

This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Amen.

At Eastertide, we give thanks to God as we sing a hymn written in 1987 by Noel and Trish Richards, contemporary British hymn-writers. Welshman Noel attended his first Christian music concert at the Colston Hall, Bristol. One of the performers at the event was Graham Kendrick. While watching Kendrick perform at the event, Richards thought to himself that that was what he wanted to do and the rest is history. We shall sing 'All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord', number 293.

**1. All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord;
Who can compare with the beauty of the Lord?
For ever he will be the Lamb upon the throne:
I gladly bow the knee and worship him alone.**

**2. I will proclaim the glory of the risen Lord,
Who once was slain to reconcile us to God.
For ever you will be the Lamb upon the throne:
I gladly bow the knee and worship you alone.**

© Noel Richards (born 1955) & Trish Richards (born 1960)

Let us pray.

Amazing God, we worship and adore you with joyful hearts as we celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ. You formed the heavens and earth with awesome power and you made us to share the beauty and wonders of this planet, to be your earthly children. Instead, we turned ourselves against you, despite your efforts to draw us back to you through the Commandments and the prophets.

In boundless grace you sent Jesus to become the One Perfect Sacrifice to atone for the sins of this world. Through Jesus' resurrection we are offered eternal life through faith in him, not through our own merit or works. God most gracious and holy, hear and accept our worship this morning and help us set aside all distractions and anxieties, so we may worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Thank you, O Lord, for this beautiful world that you created for us, for all the good things we enjoy. Most of all, thank you for coming as Jesus Christ and for loving us, even when we are unloving and unlovable, for without your grace, we would be hopeless and lost.

Merciful Father, forgive us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do, for we know what terrible suffering our Lord Jesus bore to take away the burden of human sin. Help us change from self-centred to Christ-centred living.

In sure confidence that you have heard our prayer and have restored us in your sight, we thank you, Lord. May we serve you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, so we may bring light and goodness to a sin darkened world. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

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.

We continue with a hymn by William Hamilton, a former General Secretary of the World Alliance of Presbyterian and reformed Churches. It was first published in 1936 and is now sung to an adapted version of an American cowboy song, "The streets of Laredo". Hymn number 316, 'When Easter to the dark world came'.

**1. When Easter to the dark world came,
Fair flowers glowed like scarlet flame: *Chorus***

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

**2. When Mary in the garden walked,
And with her risen Master talked: *Chorus***

**3. When John and Peter in their gloom
Met angels at the empty tomb: *Chorus***

**4. When Thomas' heart with grief was black,
Then Jesus like a king came back: *Chorus***

**5. And friend to friend in wonder said;
'The Lord is risen from the dead!' *Chorus***

**6. This Eastertide with joyful voice
We'll sing, 'The Lord is King! Rejoice!' *Chorus***

© W.H. Hamilton (1886 – 1958)

We come to our prayer of intercession for people nearby and far away. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, our celebrations of Christ's resurrection are tempered by the heart-breaking brokenness of this wonderful planet, caused mainly through our failure to live as you want us to. We acknowledge that the very selfishness, pride, greed, cruelty and indifference that led Jesus to Calvary is largely responsible for the world's problems. Lord, help us to serve you in Jesus' holy name, but we know that our power is limited, whereas yours is infinite. Therefore, we pray that you will influence people with greater power and influence to do what we cannot. Nevertheless, we bring you our concerns in Jesus' precious name.

Lord, there are so many conflicts in the world, the consequences of which are far-reaching and not only for the warring parties, but for the wider world. Jesus entered Jerusalem as Prince of Peace, died and was raised offer salvation to all-comers. Therefore, in his name we are bold to ask that the leaders of those nations learn to negotiate a just ending of conflicts. We pray for the victims of warfare, persecution, prejudice and discrimination, asking you to ease their suffering and help them rebuild what strife has destroyed, so they may live in peace and security.

We remember people in our community who are needy or troubled: those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, all who are lonely, anxious and burdened by unemployment, addiction, broken relationships or bereavement: people who are at the end of their tether. In a time of silence, we offer you names of people for whom we are particularly concerned.

Loving Lord, wherever possible enable us to offer them practical support, but embrace them with the healing of your love, so they may experience the real peace that only you can give.

Lord, hear our prayer for the Church, here and throughout the world. Give us the faith we need to stand firm when we are challenged or mocked. Keep us steadfast and loving in good times and bad. Keep us as loving in the face of opposition, as was our Saviour, so we may be bearers of the good news of God's love for everybody.

Abba, heavenly Father, may your blessing rest upon us, our families and friends. Help us to overcome the trials of life and to rejoice in the risen Lord Jesus. Keep us safe, but most of all, help us to share the abundance of your love with everyone we meet, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

We shall sing a modified version of a hymn written in the Nineteenth Century by Revd. John Mason Neale, but based on a poem by a Fifteenth Century Franciscan monk, Friar Jean Tisserand, who founded an order for penitent women in Paris. The set tune is very difficult to pick up, so when a minister in the old Stourbridge and Brierley Hill Circuit asked me if I could find a better melody, I modified Revd. Neale's words, so it can be sung to Philipp Bliss' 'Gethsemane', used for "Man of Sorrows! What a name". The words are on the sheets provided. If you sing 'Alleluia! What a Saviour!' I shall sigh, but shan't be offended! 'Sons and daughters, let us sing!

**1. Sons and daughters, let us sing!
King of heav'n, most glorious King,
Over death rose triumphing.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**2. When his foll'wers met in fear,
To them came the Lord most dear;
Saying, 'Peace be on all here.'
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**3. Thomas first the tidings heard
That they'd seen the risen Lord;
But he doubted in their word.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**4. 'My pierced side, O Thomas, see;
Look, my hands, my feet,' said he.
'Doubt no more, but trust in me.'
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**5. No more Thomas then denied,
Seeing hands and feet and side.
'You're my Lord and God!' he cried.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**6. Blest are they who have not seen,
Yet whose faith has constant been.
They eternal life shall win.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

{Jean Tisserand, trans. John Mason Neale et al.} Adapted 31/03/02 by M. Rider

The Gospel reading is John chapter 20 verses 19 to 31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said,
“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he
breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they
are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when
Jesus came. So the other disciples told him,

“We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them,
“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and
put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.
Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands.
Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to him,
“My Lord and my God!”

Then Jesus told him,
“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have believed.”

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are
not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the
Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. Amen.

*We shall continue with a hymn by Revd. Samuel Medley, an Eighteenth Century
Pastor at Byrom Street Baptist Church in Liverpool, who as a young man had no
time for God and served in the Royal Navy until he was seriously wounded.*

*It was whilst he was being tended back to health by his pious grandfather that
Samuel found Christ. This hymn makes one of the greatest statements of faith at
Easter. We shall 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}

Address – ‘*Stop doubting and believe!*’ John 20:27

Shalom Shabbat chaverim! Let me introduce myself. I am Toam, Thomas, sometimes
called Didymus the twin, but, most importantly, a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, the

Christ. I am here to explain why I asked John to write that embarrassing story about me, as a result of which I've been ridiculed as '**Doubting Thomas**' for two thousand years. I insisted John told the story, for it has an important message for us all. Now, I'm sure you know the expression that **seeing is believing**, but my Lord Jesus told me, '**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**' Let me start when we were in Jericho, travelling to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, when we heard about our friend, Lazarus lying ill at Bethany. The rest of the disciples felt such a journey was unwise, to say the least, but it was I who declared, '**Let us also go, that we may die with him**', not that I thought we would, but because I thought he was testing our faith.

After the Master raised Lazarus four days after he had died, we entered Jerusalem in triumph with crowds strewing palms and clothing in our path – even though Jesus had chosen to ride a young donkey, like a humble prophet, rather than the Messiah who we thought would rid us once and for all of the Romans, would reunite Israel and Judah into the supreme economic and political power, before making us Jews observe every detail of a new covenant.

Within a week our dreams were shattered. That zealot Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. We all fled. Even Peter lost his nerve when he was challenged at Caiaphas' palace as he tried to find out what was happening. He admitted later that he had denied even knowing Jesus three times – little wonder he kept himself to himself for the next three days.

We heard of the so-called trial, Pilate's death sentence, even though he knew our Lord was an innocent man. Next morning some of the women and John went to watch – women were deemed too unimportant to be challenged, unlike the rest of us, who hid in a barred room. They described how the Master staggered under the weight of his crossbeam, the effects of the brutal scourging being evident from the bloodstains on his back. John said when he was nailed to the cross, Jesus did not shout and swear: instead, he prayed, '**Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing**'. I ask you, he forgave the very people who were killing him in a hideous manner! Finally, a soldier had made sure he was dead by stabbing him with his spear. There was just enough time to put him in Joseph's tomb before the Passover Sabbath began.

The next two days were a nightmare for us. We wept and prayed – mainly for ourselves, not the Master. The great adventure seemed at an end – our dreams were dust and ashes before us. We were fugitives from that old vulture, Caiaphas. What had begun in glory seemed to have been reduced to a shambles with the one we had thought God's anointed sent to a cursed death like a common criminal. Then, early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene upset everyone first by claiming that Jesus' body had been taken from the tomb and, later, that she'd met the risen Lord.

Everyone except Peter and John raged at her for being foolish, because Jesus had transformed her very disturbed life and it seemed likely that she had hallucinated because she wanted to see him alive so much. John remarked that when he had gone to the tomb, the burial clothes had been folded neatly – which was not the usual thing that Caiaphas' agents would spend time doing – but the rest of us shouted him down, whilst Peter said nothing, but looked haunted and grey-faced. The atmosphere became so poisonous during the afternoon that, just for a little peace, I volunteered to fetch some extra supplies for the next day and, while I was out, Jesus suddenly appeared in that locked room as the others ate their supper. He blessed them and disappeared before I returned. I found them still ecstatic when I knocked at the door, but when they told me Jesus was alive, I went berserk. At first, I thought they were mocking Mary Magdalene, then that they were suffering from some kind of mass-hysteria. I shouted that when you

were dead, you were dead and that was the bitter end. When John tried to pacify me, I declared, **'Unless I see the wounds in his hand and side and feel them, I will not believe your claims!'**

I must confess I sulked all week – I reasoned that if Jesus had risen, he would have appeared to us all and not missed me out. Then a week to the day after he had appeared to us, we were eating supper when I saw the Lord before us – in the locked room! I could hardly breathe, especially when my Lord invited him to put my fingers in his wounds. I needed proof no longer, but fell to my knees and exclaimed, **'My Lord and my God!'** Jesus did not rebuke me, but told us that those who believed the resurrection without seeing him would be blessed.

You ask how can we believe if we do not have physical proof? Read the gospels, then Acts. What made a small group of uncomprehending, insignificant weaklings become a band of unstoppable evangelists when the Holy Spirit filled them? It was the truth that Jesus had taken away our sins by dying and that God had raised and exalted him. Why else would so many followers have died for their beliefs? After all, while some people may live a lie, they will not give their lives for a known untruth.

Christ Jesus, our Lord, call us to share the good news that God has the last word. Through the resurrection sin and death have been overcome and we believers have a new relationship with Elohim Adonai, the Almighty, a relationship open to all-comers if they receive him. Even when we believed all was lost at Calvary, divine love proved stronger than hatred and evil. It is so now, despite the current turmoil here and abroad. Situations that seemed impossible have been resolved. Consider the end of the Iron Curtain and apartheid; the peace accord in Ireland forged on Good Friday. Let us keep building God's kingdom in spirit, love and faith. As Christ Jesus said, **'Stop doubting and believe!'** Shalom Shabbat. Amen.

We conclude our Easter worship as we sing a hymn written for Easter Day, 1968 at Hockley Congregational Church, Essex by its Minister Revd. Brian Wren, who had particular concern for the needs of the Developing World. The hymn points out that Christ is not just a historical figure, but alive amongst us as we bring Good News to the world. We shall sing hymn number 297, 'Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;'

**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,
He 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.**

© *Brian A Wren (Born 1936)*

Benediction

May the risen Lord Jesus fill our hearts to overflowing with joy; may Holy Spirit guide and strengthen our discipleship. May the love of God the Father still our doubts and fears and warm our hearts. The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.