

**A service for 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 – Easter Sunday**

**Call to Worship:**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! ***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

*We shall sing our praise to Jesus with a hymn by Noel and Tricia Richards. Hymn number 293, 'All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord;'*

**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 turn to the Lord in prayer.***

Glory to you, O God our heavenly Father, for you raised Jesus from the grave, breaking the power of death and giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for you brought us salvation on the cross at Calvary and have opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, Sacred Spirit, for you guide and inspire us in our discipleship. Come, breathe new life into us.

Mighty Lord of life and love, you have overcome the old order of sin and death through the death and resurrection of your Son, Christ Jesus. Through him all things are made new and so we offer you our praise and adoration this Easter Day. Amen.

Almighty God, if we have succumbed to despair, ..... forgive us.

If we have yielded to hopelessness and fear, ..... forgive us.

If we have been unwilling to trust in you, ..... forgive us.

If we have been selfish, loveless and unlovable, ..... forgive us.

If our lives fail to reflect the victory of Christ, ..... forgive us

Loving God, we believe that you hear our prayers and you have pardoned us.

Restore and renew us to serve our neighbours gladly and faithfully in Jesus' beautiful name. 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.**

*Our next hymn was written by Charles Wesley for Easter Day in 1739 for the 1708 melody 'Lyra Davidica'. Hymn 298, 'Christ the Lord is ris'n today,'*

**1. Christ the Lord is ris'n today: Alleluia!**

**Sons of men and angels say: Alleluia!**

**Raise your joys and triumphs high: Alleluia!**

**Sing, ye heavens; thou earth, reply: Alleluia!**

**2. Love's redeeming work is done: Alleluia!  
Fought the fight, the battle won: Alleluia!  
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal: Alleluia!  
Christ hath burst the gates of hell: Alleluia!**

**3. King of Glory! Soul of bliss! Alleluia!  
Everlasting life is this: Alleluia!  
Thee to know, thy power to prove: Alleluia!  
Thus to sing, and thus to love: Alleluia!**

© Charles Wesley (1707 - 1788)

**Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 24 verses 1 to 12**

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. Amen.

*The Easter cry is echoed in the last two lines of the chorus of 'Low in the grave he lay': "He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose", for its author, Baptist Pastor Revd. Dr. Robert Lowry, was a gifted evangelist, who based the verses on Luke 24:6, "He is not here; he has risen!" "Low in the grave he lay" was written in Holy Week, 1874 and was first published, the following year, in "Brightest and Best", a Sunday School songbook which Dr. Lowry co-edited with another accomplished and prolific hymn-composer for children, Mr. William Howard Doane. The sombre, even sad metre of the verses that take us to the tomb contrast to the exultant chorus with its resurrection message. It is not surprising that this hymn is popular on Easter Sunday. Hymn number 305, 'Low in the grave he lay,'*

**1. Low in the grave he lay,  
Jesus, my Saviour,  
Waiting the coming day,  
Jesus, my Lord: Chorus  
Up from the grave he arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign:  
He arose! He arose! / Alleluia! Christ arose!**

2. Vainly they watch his bed,  
Jesus, my Saviour;  
Vainly they seal the dead,  
Jesus, my Lord: *Chorus*

3. Death cannot keep his prey,  
Jesus, my Saviour;  
He tore the bars away,  
Jesus, my Lord: *Chorus*

© Robert Lowry {1826 – 1899}

**Address:** “*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*” Luke 24:5

I find it very sad that in many churches women are denied the opportunity to play a leading role in ministry, considering the parts played by faithful women followers in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Jesus hung, dying on the cross at Calvary, his disciples were hiding behind bolted doors, except for John, whose youth probably made him unimportant to allies of the Chief Priest Caiaphas. Only his female followers were courageous and faithful enough to gather mournfully round the foot of the cross. Those same women had supported Jesus and the disciples throughout his ministry and, unlike the disciples supported him as he died. The group included Mary Magdalene, Mary, Jesus’ mother, Salome, her sister, and Clopas’ wife.

Just before daybreak on the Sunday after Jesus’ death, it was this group of women who set out for the tomb in which Jesus had been laid to rest on the even of the Sabbath. There had been no time to anoint his body with herbs and ointments according to Jewish custom, so they wanted to perform this last service to the Lord. It is worth noting that the male disciples left them to the take, probably out of fear of being taken prisoner, but quite likely because handling a dead body made you ceremonially unclean in Jewish Law – it was all right for the women to be unclean, but not the men, apparently!

The group of women must have wondered how they would remove the huge stone that sealed the tomb, but when they arrived, they found the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. As they stood, wondering what was happening, two men in radiant clothing – presumably angels – said, “**Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’**”

Therefore, these women were the first witnesses of the resurrection, the first to declare, “**Christ is alive!**” but the disciples and the other people in that locked room disbelieved the good news as nonsense. Only Peter ventured to the tomb, saw the burial clothes lying in the tomb and went away, ‘**wondering to himself what had happened.**’ Even he did not fully accept the resurrection till Christ appeared to him later that day. Only the humble women accepted the resurrection at face value and like the shepherds in the birth story, their testimony was considered ‘nonsense’.

What does the resurrection of Christ mean to us? It means that sin and death no longer have the last word, because Christ has overcome them. It means that the love of God in Jesus is stronger than all the world’s evils. We are his, even amid the loneliness and uncertainty of the past year and though the world has suffered grievously, there is still hope if we play our part by caring for one another. We shall emerge from lockdown and as we do so I hope we can cherish the acts of generosity and kindness in society at large and

set aside our irritation at a minority who were foolish and selfish. If we learn to be compassionate, then something good may emerge from this time of trial.

We should learn from the faith of the women from Galilee, who not only supported Jesus at the risk of their own lives, but who became the first evangelists, witnesses to the risen Christ. They did not ask for status, or thanks, but served the Lord humbly and lovingly. May we all have the grace to serve our risen Saviour as humbly, faithfully and well in a world where some scoff at the proclamation, 'Christ is risen!' **"He is risen indeed! Alleluia!"** Amen.

*We continue our worship with an ancient hymn, written in the Eighth Century A.D. by St. John of Damascus for the Eastern Church. It was translated by Revd. John Mason Neale and first published in 1862. Hymn number 311, 'The day of resurrection'*

**1. The day of resurrection,  
Earth, tell it out abroad!  
The Passover of gladness,  
The Passover of God!  
From death to life eternal,  
From earth unto the sky,  
Our Christ hath brought us over  
With hymns of victory.**

**2. Our hearts be pure from evil,  
That we may see aright  
The Lord in rays eternal  
Of resurrection light;  
And, listening to his accents,  
May hear, so calm and plain,  
His own "All hail!" and, hearing,  
May raise the victor strain.**

**3. Now let the heavens be joyful,  
Let earth her song begin,  
The round world keep high triumph,  
And all that is therein;  
Let all things seen and unseen  
Their notes in gladness blend,  
For Christ the Lord is risen,  
Our joy that has no end.**

© *St. John of Damascus (c. 675 – 750) trans. John Mason Neale (1811 – 1866)*

***We come to our prayer of intercession. When I say, 'Lord of life', please answer, 'Hear us in your love'. Let us pray.***

Remember, O Lord, in your love the Church both locally and world-wide. May we know your power and may our words and actions be a sign that Jesus is risen.

**Lord of life..... Hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love they world you created: people who seek a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including coronavirus vaccines; those strive for justice and wellbeing, thinking especially of the NHS, scientists, carers and key-workers at present...

**Lord of life..... Hear us in your love.**

Remember, O Lord, all who are broken or mournful because of the COVID19 pandemic. In the name of the risen Lord Jesus, enfold us with your love, comfort and strengthen us. Renew our flagging spirits and bring us through this darkness into the light of your salvation. ....

**Lord of life..... Hear us in your love.**

May the whole earth be transformed by mercy and rejoice in hope. We pray for people who suffer: the victims of prejudice, oppression, injustice, terrorism and conflict ...

**Lord of life..... Hear us in your love.**

Abba, Father God, look upon us, our families and our friends with compassion. Teach us to bring the light of the gospel message into the darkest corners of your kingdom for as long as we live, in the glorious name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*We conclude our worship with a hymn by Edmond Budry, who was born in Vevey, Switzerland. After he was ordained, he became the Pastor of a Protestant church, the Free Evangelical Church of the Canton of Vaud. 'Thine be the glory..' was probably inspired by a German hymn, written by F.H. Ranke, composed for Advent and written to be sung to Handel's tune, "Maccabaeus". Budry's hymn of 1884 was 'A toi la gloire, O Ressuscite' - To you be glory, O Risen One. It was discovered by Richard Hoyle, a Baptist Pastor, who translated it in its present form in 1923, ready for its inclusion in the hymn book of the World Student Christian Federation, 'Cantate Domino' - Sing to the Lord. Hymn number 313, 'Thine be the glory'*

**1. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hath won;  
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
Kept the folded grave-clothes where Thy body lay: Chorus:  
*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hath won.***

**2. Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
Lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom,  
Let His church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting: Chorus:**

**3. No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life!  
Life is naught 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: Chorus:**

© Edmond Budry {1854 – 1932} Tr. Richard Hoyle {1875 – 1939}

***Benediction.***

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.**