

**Worship intended for Codsall & Beckminster Methodist Church (StF)
26th April, 2020**

Call to Worship: Psalm 117

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD. Amen.

We shall sing our first hymn, not to “Church Triumphant” as I intended, but to “Herongate”. ‘Let us to Jesus raise our voice,’

1. Let us to Jesus raise our voice;

May we and all the world rejoice.

**He came to earth, in wondrous grace,
As Saviour of the human race!**

2. Christ died for sinners on the cross,

For us he counted all as loss:

**From Satan’s power he set us free –
Redeemed our souls at Calvary.**

3. Despised by those he came to save,

Our Lord was laid in borrowed grave;

**Yet on the third day he was raised
And left his followers amazed!**

4. And as our King and Shepherd leads,

Our hungry souls with love he feeds,

So we can take Good News to all

And answer his most gracious call.

5. Then let us raise our voice and sing

Our heartfelt praise to Christ our King,

Whose grace and goodness know no bound:

In whom full life is to be found.

Martin Rider (at Wednesfield MHA for Cradley Forge 18th November, 2011 – To “Church Triumphant”, HP 182 Modified 20th February, 2012 – or “Herongate” StF415 & “Duke Street” StF659)

Let us pray.

Glorious God our Redeemer, we have come to worship you with joyful hearts, for we celebrate the resurrection of your Son Christ Jesus. For love of sinful humankind Jesus came into the world to share our lives bringing us Good News in both words and deeds. He was willing to become the one perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world and break Satan’s power over us. When he was raised on the third day, Christ broke open heaven’s gates, to offer us eternal life through his grace alone, not by our own merit or our works. Amazing God, may your Name be praised and glorified for evermore.

Thank you, O Lord, for this beautiful, on which we live, for all the good things that we enjoy and give value and meaning to our lives; thank you for people who have guided us, inspired us and loved us. Yet, as we praise you for your redemptive grace, we feel ashamed of how far short we have fallen

from what you would have us be, for we know what a terrible price Christ Jesus paid at Calvary for our sinfulness.

Therefore, merciful God, we confess that we have not loved or served you wholeheartedly; nor have we loved others as we would like to be loved by them. For the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do, forgive us for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus, who said that all who repent in his name will receive a pardon from you.

Loving, living God, as you hear our prayers, we believe you have already forgiven us and offer us a fresh start. May your Holy Spirit help us to serve you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully from now onward, in the beautiful name of Jesus, our risen Lord. 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 shall sing a hymn by Revd. Samuel Medley, an Eighteenth Century Pastor at Byrom Street Baptist Church in Liverpool, who, like John Newton, as a young man had no time for God and served in the Royal Navy until he was seriously wounded. Whilst he was being tended back to health by his pious grandfather Samuel found Christ and wrote one of the greatest statements of faith at Easter. We shall sing hymn number 303, 'I know that my Redeemer lives –'

Offertory

We shall now bring our concerns for neighbours nearby and far away to the Lord our God in our prayers of intercession.

Living Lord, through whose loving-kindness we have been blessed in so many ways, we offer our praise and thanksgiving to you, the sustainer of all life and our Saviour. Whilst we celebrate the beauty of the world, we also recognize its brokenness, much of which stems from human pride, foolishness, greed, spite and cruelty. Help us to serve our neighbours as your earthly hands by granting us the necessary wisdom, courage, steadfastness, insight and compassion, so we may answer Jesus' call to service.

Lord, we pray for the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and understanding may grow among the nations and peoples. We pray for the governments of the nations, that through them mercy and justice may be established and endure. Teach us the value of negotiation and compromise when disputes arise, so we can resist the temptation to take up arms. We pray for our enemies and those who wrong us that we may bear a Christian witness and offer peace for hostility and kindness for hatred. We remember, too, the victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution throughout the earth: people whose lives have been changed by injuries to body, mind or spirit; those who have lost loved ones and especially refugees forced from their

homes and whose search for safety often leads to them being exploited, or put in harm's way. Grant all for whom we pray hope, courage and support, so they may rebuild their lives.

We pray for everybody who ministers to and cares for the suffering, the friendless and the needy, that they shall fulfil the Lord's purposes in their work and outreach. We pray for the deliverance of victims of the coronavirus COVID 19 and we grieve with families who have lost loved ones in this pandemic. Heavenly Father, many of us are filled with anguish about the suffering of people here and abroad that we hear about in the Media. Our courage and faith are being tested by the bleakness of both the gloomy news and the strains of the lockdown. Take away our doubts and reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we all may face an uncertain, even threatening future, with grounded hope.

We certainly remember with gratitude all doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, care workers, key-workers and kind-hearted volunteers in the United Kingdom who are potentially putting themselves in harm's way as they seek to help Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society. Lord, guide, protect and bless them in their work.

Loving Lord, hear our prayer for the NHS which we know is under immense pressure. May it receive the support and equipment it needs to heal the sick and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society. We offer our thanks for the healing rendered at our local hospitals, especially New Cross, Russells Hall and The Corbett, as well as for our GPs and health workers in the community. Give them the determination and courage to cope with the pressures they are facing and may they find blessing and safety in their work.

God our inspiration and guide, bless, inspire and aid governments, scientists, researchers and authorities as they seek to deal with the effects of COVID 19 and to protect their populations by their policies. May those policies prove effective in controlling the disease. Hear our prayer for countries that lack welfare systems to combat this virus, and grant that international support will soon be forthcoming, despite the needs of better equipped nations that are preoccupied with COVID 19 at home.

We remember people in our community who are sick in body, mind or spirit, those bowed down by the pressures of life, failed relationships and bereavement, for all who live with a dementia and everybody who cares for their needs. In a time of silence, we bring our concerns to you, confident that, as we name them in our hearts, you will know their needs and reach out to them.Gracious God, where it is possible, let us be part of the answer of our prayer for those around us, by being sensitive to their needs and offering practical support, but hold everybody for whom we pray in your loving arms so they may find comfort, courage, healing, hope and above all else your peace which passes all understanding.

Lord hear our prayer for the whole Church of Christ, that professing one Lord, one faith and one baptism, all whom Christ has called may learn to live in the unity of the one Spirit and take Good News to all peoples. We pray for everybody who takes the gospel to the world that they are able to draw all-comers to Christ Jesus through their sincerity and boldness of spirit. And also to all who receive God's Word, that they may discover his holiness and glory.

We thank you and praise you for all your saints in this world and the next. Grant them the fullness of your eternal joy. Strengthen us by their fellowship, so we may follow their examples and guide other people to know and love Jesus the risen Lord.

Abba, heavenly Father, keep us, our friends and families safe in your care. Bring us through these troubled times, trusting in your grace and sharing the love you give us in such abundance with our neighbours and honouring you in all we do and say. Amen.

We shall continue our worship as we sing Brian Wren's lovely hymn, number 297, 'Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;'

Our New Testament reading is 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 17 to 23

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. Amen.

The Gospel reading is St. Luke chapter 24 verses 13 to 35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them,

"What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him,

"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

“What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

He said to them,

“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other,

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. Amen.

We shall sing our next hymn which I wrote in 2004, ‘God the Father be praised,’

1. God the Father be praised!

From the tomb Christ is raised –

Mourning friends stand amazed –

Jesus Christ is risen!

All our sins forgiven: *Chorus*

God be praised, praised, praised!

Christ is raised, raised, raised!

Satan falls, Jesus calls,

“Come, my friends, and follow!”

**2. On that first Easter Day
Two friends talked in dismay –
But were joined on their way –
Jesus Christ is risen!**

All our sins forgiven: *Chorus*

**3. At their home, breaking bread,
They knew one they thought dead;
Back to Zion they sped –
Jesus Christ is risen!**

All our sins forgiven: *Chorus*

**4. To the Lord let us bring,
Songs of praise for our King –
Where O death is your sting?
Jesus Christ is risen!**

And new life is given: *Chorus*

God be praised, praised, praised!

Christ is raised, raised, raised!

Satan falls – Jesus calls:

Loving Lord, we'll follow!

M. Rider (to HP 220 "Theodoric" written between 17th and 18th April, 2004). Modified 2nd May, 2011

Address: "... and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread." Luke 24:35

Shabbat Shalom! May the wholeness of God's blessing be yours, my friends. Let me introduce myself. I am Cleopas, sometimes called Alphaeus, a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, husband of Mary and father of James, Joses and Salome. I want to explain the extraordinary events on the afternoon, three days after my friend, Jesus was crucified.

A week earlier, we had watched Jesus ride into Jerusalem to cries of "Hosanna!" and to great adulation from a huge crowd. It seemed strange for a man who we thought would free us from Roman oppression to have ridden on a young donkey, but the crowd didn't seem to mind and we now know that our understanding of the Scriptures had been corrupted by nationalist pride. Mind you, none of us expected such a change of fortune to have occurred. Christ Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Seder Meal upstairs whilst a number of others relived the Hagadar – the Passover Story – as we ate ours in the room below. Jesus seemed troubled as he led eleven of the disciples out to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane – we'd seen Judas Iscariot go out part way through our meal, but didn't realise the significance, or we'd have tried to stop him.

A couple of hours later, frantic disciples beat on the door, saying Judas had betrayed the Master, that he'd been taken to Caiaphas' Palace and hadn't resisted. Peter came back some time later, a broken, brooding character, far from his usual talkative self. He just sat in a corner, weeping. Soon after, news came that the Governor, Pontius Pilate, had condemned Jesus to death – not because he was guilty, but because he wanted to appease the crowd whose cries of "Hosanna!" had turned to "Crucify him!". We men were too afraid to venture out, lest Caiaphas' Temple Guards recognized and arrested us, but the women, including my Mary, witnessed the sentence being carried out. The details are too painful to go over again, but let me tell you bitter tears were shed on that evening, the eve of Pessach, you may call it Passover,

particularly as it meant that the Lord was laid in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, without time for the traditional anointing with spices and herbs.

The following day, tears gave way to angry recriminations and inaction, for Peter made no attempt to offer us a way forward. More tears were shed and, yes, we prayed – but mainly for our own deliverance. The flowers of hope had withered with the Master's death: salvation had been postponed indefinitely – Good News abandoned. The future seemed uncertain – indeed, we feared that, if the Sanhedrin caught us, we'd have no future. As it was the Sabbath, we could do nothing, but early in the morning of the first day of the week, a number of our womenfolk left the barred room, carrying wrappings, herbs and spices to perform the Hebrew funeral anointing for Jesus, though they were worried that they wouldn't be able to move the stone that sealed the tomb. We men remained inside the room, not just because we were afraid, but because handling a dead body meant we would be ceremonially unclean – which is why we left it to the women.

About half an hour later, Mary Magdalene returned, almost hysterical, beating on the door and shouting, **'They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!'** Without hesitation, Peter and John Mark left the house and dashed to the burial ground. They returned after a while, looking confused but saying nothing. Soon after, the door resounded to Mary Magdalene's frantic blows, but this time she was crying with joy, **'I have seen the Lord!'** Well, John's brother, James, lived up to his nickname, the Thunderer. He shouted at her to shut up before everyone in Jerusalem discovered where we were. Others accused her of being hysterical, of having imagined she had seen the risen Jesus. They declared that once you were dead, that was the end – just as our mission had ended at Golgotha. Peter still sat in the corner, grey-faced and silent, but young John Mark tried to defend Mary, saying that the burial shawl and face wrappings had been folded where Jesus had lain and he believed this could only mean he was alive. The disciples shouted him down, reiterating that death was the bitter end, at least until the Day of Judgement! The atmosphere in the room grew poisonous, so unpleasant that my Mary and I decided to risk the twenty-five mile walk home to Emmaus, just to escape the arguments and vitriolic comments.

So there we were, plodding along, despondent that what had begun as a great adventure had ended in ashes of hopelessness: our Messiah killed as a common criminal; neither revolution nor salvation and, to cap it all, the body had disappeared from the tomb! Mary insisted that she had heard an angel say that Jesus had risen, but I couldn't accept her word – even though we've raised three children and she's always seemed a very stable woman – unlike Mary Magdalene used to be! We had considerable time to try to make sense of what had happened, but as we walked, Mary and I were overtaken by a figure who asked what we were discussing, much to our amazement, for the crucifixion of Jesus had been the talk of Jerusalem for the past three days!

"Where have you been for the last week?" we asked, incredulously. "You must be the only man in Jerusalem who doesn't know what has happened to make us so sad." We explained how we had believed that our friend, the prophet Jesus of Nazareth, was God's anointed, who would redeem Israel, but he'd been betrayed and crucified. Matters had been made worse because this very day, Mary Magdalene and some other women, including my Mary, found his tomb empty and claimed an angel had told them the Lord had risen.

Mary was about to argue with me when the stranger spoke.

“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

The man went on to explain how the prophets had pointed to the way in which God’s salvation would come through Jesus. By the time we reached our home, it was near sunset, but Mary and I had so enjoyed the conversation with the stranger we offered him hospitality. Even then we clearly did not recognise the risen Jesus until he broke the bread and blessed it. The way he did it revealed him as the Christ, yet in the time it took for Mary and me to exchange astonished glances, Jesus had gone, leaving us to reflect upon what had happened. We remembered how our hearts were warmed as the risen Christ revealed the mystery of the cross to us. We learned that God’s salvation had come through sacrificial love, not through brute force, for when Jesus appeared weakest, nailed to the cross, his grace was strong enough to break Satan’s power.

What message does the encounter on the Emmaus Road have for you? Just as Mary recognised the risen Christ when he called her by her name, so we realised his identity when he performed a familiar action. In other words, we can encounter Jesus in mundane parts of our lives – we don’t need mountain top meetings, or Damascus Road experiences. We can meet Christ in other people, too, when we give or receive help, when we share communion, or when we pray. Even when situations seem hopeless, they are not, for the resurrection means that Jesus has defeated sin and death. God has the last word: he has triumphed and continues to do so. Through Christ’s grace we are freed from the burden of sin to serve him as a loving response, not because we have to earn our salvation.

A final thought. When we realised the significance of Jesus’ resurrection, we returned at once, though it was dark, to joyfully share the Good News with the others. Are you prepared to brave this world’s spiritual darkness and share the gospel message? We have rarely lived in a period when the light of truth and hope needs to shine brightly. May the risen Lord grant you the grace to take the Good News to the world in all you do and say. Shabbat Shalom! Amen.

We close our worship with a hymn written by Canon Edward Burns in 1961 – a challenge and call to arms for us all. Hymn number 418, “We have a gospel to proclaim,” Don’t we just!

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and forever more. Amen.