

Easter worship 2020 (StF)

(with an address based upon one given by Revd. Judith Breiner at Wordsley in 1996)

Call to Worship: Alleluia! Christ is risen! – **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

In 1920 the Soviet Union held a great anti-God rally in Kiev. For an hour the great speaker, Bukharin, ridiculed the Christian faith with argument and abuse. At the end of his speech, listeners were invited to ask questions. A Russian priest stood, faced the people and simply said,

“Jesus is risen!” At once the people rose and answered,

“He is risen indeed. Alleluia!” The atheist speaker had no answer. Let us respond to the priest’s call, ‘**Jesus is risen**’, by shouting, ‘**He is risen**

indeed. Alleluia!’ Let us echo their cry of faith:

Jesus is risen! - **He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

We begin with a hymn by Charles Wesley: Hymn number 298, ‘Christ the Lord is risen today; Alleluia!’

Let us pray.

Glorious heavenly Father, all honour, glory, power and praise are yours alone, for as we celebrate the day on which you raised our Saviour from death, we know that this fulfilled your divine plan to rescue humankind from the power of both sin and death. For love of sinners like us, you sent Jesus to live among us, not only so he could bring Good News in words and deeds, but to become the One Perfect Sacrifice that atones for the sins of this world. Jesus revealed your boundless grace for everybody by his life, death and resurrection and he offers us eternal life through faith in him, not through our own merit or works. Amazing God, all honour, glory, power and praise are rightly yours now and evermore.

Thank you, O Lord, for this beautiful world that you created for us, for all the good things we enjoy: for experiences, opportunities that have brought us fulfilment and enriched our lives. Thank you for coming as Jesus Christ, but above all, thank you 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 we don’t always love and serve you wholeheartedly and don’t love others as we’d like them to love us. We are profoundly aware of the terrible suffering our Lord Jesus bore to take away the burden of human sin. Help us turn away from sin and forgive us in Jesus’ name, for he said that all who truly repent will be forgiven.

In sure confidence that you have heard our prayer and have restored us in your sight, we thank you, Lord. May we serve you in Spirit, truth and love, 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.

“Christ is alive! No longer bound / To distant years in Palestine, / He comes to claim the here and now, / And conquer every place and time.” Lovely words of a hymn written for Easter at Hockley Congregational Church, Essex by its Minister Revd. Brian Wren, who had particular concern for the needs of the Developing World. This hymn reminds us that Jesus belongs to today as well as the distant past. We shall sing hymn number 297, ‘Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;’

Notices & Offertory

In our prayers of intercession we bring our concerns for people nearby and far away to Almighty God. Let us pray.

Amazing heavenly Father, God most gracious and holy, as we celebrate our Saviour’s triumph over sin and death for our sakes, we know our response should be to serve our neighbours as your earthly hands, doing good as often as we can to as many people as we can. May the perfect example of Jesus, our Redeemer, be our guide in serving our neighbours and playing our part in building a better world.

Lord, we pray for the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and understanding may grow among the nations and peoples, for the governments of the nations, so mercy and justice may be established and prevail. 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 the victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution throughout the earth: people whose lives have been changed by injuries to body, mind or spirit; others who have lost loved ones and refugees whose search for safety often leads to them being exploited, or put in the way of harm. Grant them 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 fulfil God’s purposes in their work and outreach. We remember victims of the coronavirus COVID 19 and pray for their deliverance. Help them and us remember that you are with us in this time of trial, so we all may face an uncertain, even threatening future, with grounded hope. We remember with gratitude all doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, care workers and kind-hearted volunteers in the United Kingdom who are 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. May it receive the support it needs to heal its weaknesses and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society, especially with the challenge of Coronavirus. We offer our thanks especially for the healing rendered at our local hospitals, New Cross, Russells Hall and The Corbett, for our GPs and health workers in the community. Help them to cope with the pressures they are facing and may they find blessing and safety in their work.

God our inspiration and guide, 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. Hear our prayer for countries that lack welfare systems to combat this virus, and grant that international support will soon be forthcoming and let your blessing rest upon medical staff and scientists who are seeking to bring healing around the world.

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 all 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, 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, our risen Lord, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

We continue 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. We shall sing hymn number 303, 'I know that my Redeemer lives -'

The first reading is St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 15 verses 19 to 26

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is John chapter 20 verses 1 to 18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said,

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

Jesus said to her,

“Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic,

“Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

Jesus said,

“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her. Amen.

We shall sing the hymn on our sheets, ‘Alleluia! Christ is risen!’

1. Alleluia! Christ is risen!

O what rapture! Jesus lives!

By his blood, our sins forgiven;

Raised again, new life he gives.

Let us sing the Easter Story,

Of God’s Son who died so we

Are at one with God the Father:

What can mar our ecstasy?

2. Mournful women went at daybreak

To the tomb where Jesus lay,

Saw the entrance standing open,

And their hearts filled with dismay.

John and Peter ran to find him,

But they found within the tomb

Strips of linen, neatly-folded –

Not their Master – in the gloom.

3. When they left, poor Mary lingered,

Wept hot tears of bleak despair:

Someone asked why she was weeping,

Who it was that she sought there:

Thinking he was just a workman,

Mary asked him if he’d say

Who had taken Jesu’s body –

Show her where her Master lay.

4. “Mary,” called the shadowed stranger –

And at once she knew that sound –

“Rabbouni!” she cried in wonder,

**Fell before him on the ground.
Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Where, O death, your victory?
Jesus lives and Satan's vanquished
By the Lamb of Calvary!**

Martin Rider 9th March, 2002 - dedicated to the church members at New Street. { to "Lux Eoi"} modified 14/03/2016

Address: *Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" John 20:18*
Shabbat Shalom, my friends. I am Mary of Magdala, for three years a follower of Jesus, who cured me of 'seven demons' in terms we used two thousand years ago. Today, I would have been regarded as somebody with serious mental health issues, perhaps bipolar, for I was unstable and suffered severe mood swings. I was, and still am, a free-thinker, who questions the status quo, especially the way in which women are treated as second class citizens. I confess I was not easy to live with – my family said I was impossible, till I met the Rabbi, as we called my Lord Jesus.

I became one of a loyal band of women who travelled with the Lord and his disciples, trying to find the accommodation, food and water, looking after their needs. In return we were able to hear him preach good news, perform healings and miracles that marked him apart from other rabbis. Jesus really knew his scriptures; his prayers were heartfelt and his compassion extraordinary. He had time for everybody, male and female, Jew and Gentile, in a time when most Jews would not. He was unafraid to break down taboos, by touching the leprous, by healing the blind, sick and lame. I suppose the Master's rejection of preconceived attitudes, traditions and practices appealed to my rebellious nature, but I loved him for it.

Imagine how excited we all were as the Master entered Jerusalem at the beginning of the Passover, as crowds cast clothes and palm branches beneath the donkey's feet and cried out, 'Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' They clearly saw him as the Christ, God's anointed, but they were anticipating a political or military revolution.

On the Thursday before the Passover Sabbath, the Master arranged a Todah meal for the twelve. We heard them leave after dark and thought they had just gone out to pray on the Mount of Olives, but quite a while afterwards, several of the disciples returned in sheer disbelief and terror. They insisted we barred the doors and eventually, after they became calmer, told us the news we had dreaded. The Master had been seized by the temple guard, had surrendered without resisting and was being taken to the palace of the Chief Priest, Caiaphas. Worse still, Judas Iscariot had actually betrayed the Master – with a kiss of greeting.

One by one, other followers returned, some nearly hysterical with grief and fear, but Peter did not come back until the dawn of sabbath eve. His face was grey. He would not speak, but kept crying and beating his breast. We didn't know at the time that he'd denied knowing Jesus three times that evening. Soon after dawn, a couple of Galilean friends knocked on the door,

entered and told us that the Master had been taken before the Governor, Pontius Pilate, who tried to secure the Master's freedom by offering the crowd a choice between the Master and a violent insurrectionist called Jesus Barabbas. It was a huge mistake, because the high priests encouraged the mob to cry for the Master's death. Pilate could have asserted his authority, but he simply gave in and washed his hands of the matter. Our friends said that our Jesus was going to be crucified that very morning.

We were in complete despair. It didn't seem possible. Worse still, the men refused to leave the house. Only John Mark was willing to come and he was too young to be considered a threat by the authorities. As for us women, well, we were of no account. I don't want to go into too much detail, for they disturb me still: his coat bloodstained from the scourging; the crown of thorns beaten into his head; his crucifixion – hanging there naked and in agony; the jeers and scorn of his enemies. But I will tell you three things, the first being his appeal to the Almighty. 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing!' How could anybody dying like that ask forgiveness of the perpetrators? The compassion he had for his mother, by putting her into John's care. The amazement of the centurion who watched him die. 'Surely, this was the Son of God!'

After it was all over, we watched Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea take down the Lord, wrap him in a linen sheet and take him quickly to Joseph's own tomb, just before the sabbath star arose. We saw a large boulder rolled in front of the entrance and then we went to that locked room, numb with grief.

Early on the morning of the first day in the week, several women, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome and I ventured out and made our way to the tomb where Jesus lay. We wondered how we could move the sealing stone and if it was being guarded, but when we arrived, the stone had already been rolled from the opening. I don't know what came over me, but I turned and ran, leaving my friends standing in amazement. Upon reaching the house, I banged on the door frantically and told the men that the Lord had been taken. Peter and John sprinted towards the tomb, leaving me trailing in their wake. I had still not reached the tomb when I saw them returning. Young John said he thought Jesus had risen, but Peter, looking haggard, snorted and pulled him away. Mary and Salome were still standing there, unsure what to do, but I ventured to the tomb and peered in. There were two figures dressed in white sitting where the Master had been laid. They gently asked me why I was crying and I bitterly replied that my Lord's body had been taken away and I did not know where I could find it.

A shadow fell over me. I turned and saw the silhouette of a man, who I mistook for a gardener. He, too, asked why I was crying, so I faced him and implored,

‘Sir, if you’ve taken him away, tell me where he is and I’ll get him!’ The shadowed figure said simply, ‘Mary.’ I knew the voice. I recognized the inflection when he was calming me. It was Jesus and he had risen from the dead! I ought to have known, for he said he’d rise on the third day.

‘Rabbouni , my Master!’ I exclaimed as I fell at his feet. He explained that I shouldn’t cling to him at that time but should go to the disciples, whom he still called ‘brother’ despite all their failures and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’

I hurried back to the house and beat on the door again, shouting, ‘I’ve seen the Lord. He’s risen from the dead. He’s alive!’ Do you think they were grateful? Of course not. They dragged me inside, rebuked me for making such a noise in case Caiaphas’ spies located them. As for news of the resurrection; they told me I was mad; that I’d been so stricken with grief it had turned my mind once more. The women and John Mark took my side, but Peter refused to be drawn. He was afraid of what the Lord would do and say when they next met. So, the atmosphere grew heated once again.

To be honest, I didn’t care. I knew that Jesus, my Saviour – our Saviour – has been raised from the dead, which means that all he said is true. Our sins are forgiven, death no longer has the final word, God’s kingdom is here, goodness has triumphed over evil, love has conquered hatred. But oh, at what a cost was our salvation brought. God’s own dear Son died for us, indeed for the worst sinners in the land. I’ll bear the disbelief of the disciples, their scorn, for the Lord lives and I’m sure he’ll soon reveal himself to the men. Christ Jesus is alive! Alleluia, Amen!

We conclude our worship as we sing a hymn by Revd. Fred Pratt Green. We sing hymn number 314, “This joyful Eastertide, what need is there for grieving?”

Benediction

May the risen Lord Jesus bring light to lift the gloominess of the world. May he warm our hearts, renew our hopes and help us to be willing to answer our call to serve our neighbours in his holy name.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us now and forever more. Amen.