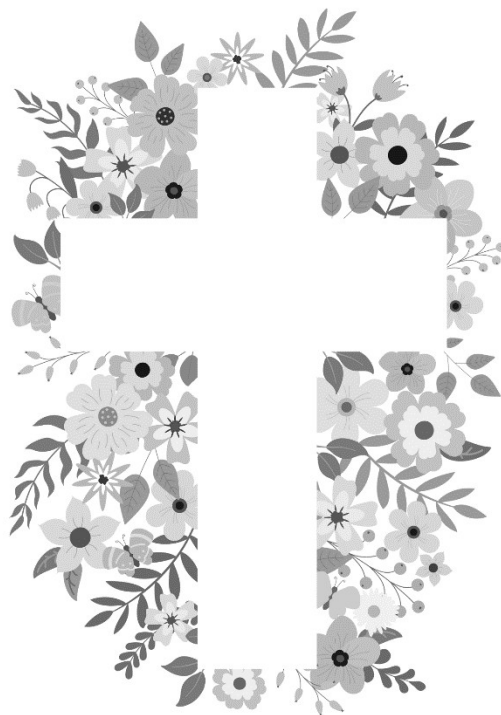


A month of Sundays March 2024



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

Sunday 3rd March 2024

Call to worship

Being human, we often forget God,
who gives us in each moment the breath of life;
who holds our wondrous universe in being,
and loves it, and all of us as a part of it.
Let us worship our God,
and learn to live a more godly life.

Bible readings: Exodus 20:1-17

The Ten Commandments

20 And God spoke all these words:

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

⁸“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labour and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹² “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ “You shall not murder.

¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ “You shall not steal.

¹⁶ “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

John 2:13-22

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

²⁰ They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Hymn Stf 293: All Heaven Declares

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.

Noël Richards (b. 1955) and Tricia Richards (b. 1960)

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Prayers of intercession

Lord of the poor and the rich,
we pray for those who live and labour in developing countries
paid less than the amount they need to survive.
We commend to your tender love those who are exploited,
children who are paid pennies, those who work in sweatshops.
You desire justice for all people;
you yearn for all people to be treated fairly and equitably.
Lord of the world and the church:
bring healing and peace.

Lord of the chapel and the cathedral,
we pray for all places of worship throughout the world.
We commend to you caretakers and cleaners, treasurers and guides.
You desire holiness in your children
and in the places in which they worship.
Lord of the world and the church:
bring healing and peace.

Lord of all in need,
we bring to you the prayers of our hearts.
We commend to you those about whom we are especially concerned,
praying for...
You desire that your children care for one another.
Lord of the world and the church:
bring healing and peace.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Reflection

The Ten Commandments are God's guidance to live out the human vocation to help God take care of the planet, to be co-workers, co-creators with God. When God created the world, humans were given a special place within it, to help God love and sustain it. We are stewards of God's creation, each of us lent, for a while, our place, our corner where we stand as God's steward.

The list of commandments is our guidance. It is introduced by God identifying Godself as the one who has brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. In that context, these rules are to help you learn how to live well in freedom. Escape from Egypt was of huge significance to the runaway Israelite slaves, a defining moment that they would forever remember. And today we too hear and receive the Good News that God is a God who breaks chains and releases us into freedom, and that living in freedom is part of our heritage.

Therefore, the first three commandments begin with the absolute priority to live focused on the living God, the true source of power in the universe. The Israelites lived among people who had much more tangible gods than their own: the sun, moon... These people also made images for gods and bowed down to them. It was hard for the Israelite people to worship an invisible God, a God whose power could not be tied down into an 'idea' or an 'image'.

It is also hard for us. It is much easier to focus ourselves on what is short-term achievable – a new house, job, car, beauty product – than it is to worship and place ultimate worth on an invisible presence. It is easier to write books about 'ideas' of God than to surrender to the 'living God', who cannot be contained within an idea.

The third commandment is: You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. The Israelites, and we too, have used the name of God to endorse horrific crimes, injustices and power games. The first three commandments invite us to put our lives entirely at the disposal of the living, invisible God.

The fourth commandment encompasses a loving, compassionate work ethic, a rhythm of work and rest, pausing and appreciation. This is not only for us, but for those often not considered important, but whose work keeps the status quo going – families, slaves, animals, refugees. We remember Jesus said, ‘Come unto me all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. My yoke is light.’ The universe is sustained with a life-thriving rhythm and with abundance. Overworking and exploitation is going against the nature of how the universe was created to be.

The fifth commandment honours the family with the focus on parents. The next four commandments safeguard the integrity of life and thriving community. But the last commandment demands that we pay attention to the condition of our heart, our inner attitudes, to guard against coveting what is not ours. In our present day, advertising targets our inner attitudes, enticing us to covet many things that we neither need nor can afford. This stirs up a sense of ‘not enough’ and destroys thriving community.

The Ten Commandments give God’s guidance to fulfilling the human vocation to be co-carers with God in looking after the planet, focused on God, respect for family, the integrity of thriving community and requiring inner commitment and transformation.

When we look at Jesus we see who we are created to become: ‘The glory of God [in] a human being fully alive.’ The John reading shows Jesus’ anger at the Temple authorities who were, on the surface of it, enabling people to keep the detailed rules of how you kept the Law. But they were denying the love that was the underlying spirit of the Law. The vulnerable in the community were being robbed and exploited in the name of keeping the Law. It was all taking place in the Temple, desecrating the place of God’s presence.

Jesus could not stand by, as God’s Son, and do nothing. So – we too are invited to follow God’s guidance to grow up to our Christlike humanity. And there will be times where we too cannot stand by and say and do nothing.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Loving God, thank you for your gift of freedom.
Thank you also for giving us guidance
on how to be fully alive and loving.
Be with us as we put your guidance into practice,
and help us to enjoy sharing your beautiful world.
Amen.

Sunday 10th March 2024

Call to worship

Wonderful God, in the very beginning,
the first thing you gave us was your light,
your heavenly light,
even before you made the sun.
In your light we flourish.
And we call your Son, Jesus Christ,
the light of the world.
He reaches into our darkness,
and heals us, and makes us whole.
Today, help us to learn how
to be children of your light.
Amen.

Bible reading: Numbers 21:4-9

The Bronze Snake

⁴ They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; ⁵ they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

⁶ Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

⁸ The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

John 3:14-21

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Reflection

By the time we come to this week’s reading from the Old Testament, the Israelites have been wandering for many years in an area about the size of Wales after their escape from slavery in Egypt. They have had many ups and downs on the journey. But by this stage they are fed up with the bland food, fed up with their quality of life and feel that they had been better off in slavery – at least they had had flavoursome food. The journey into freedom has lost its romance and they discover it is very hard work living a free life in community together. The story tells us that God got fed up with their grumbling and sent poisonous serpents that bit the Israelites, many of whom died. This was a particularly dark time for the people, and they hit rock bottom. Fortunately, the people come to their senses and recognise that they have sinned by not trusting in God to provide for their true needs. They come to Moses who prays to God for the people. The result is that they make a bronze image of the serpent, put it on a pole and those that look to it are healed and live.

There is powerful symbolism here. If we stop running from the negative things in our life that we find challenging and turn to face them, we find God’s resources within us to deal with them and to find new life. This comes out in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. Sin, our own, and our suffering from those who have sinned against us, can seem to cripple us. Or our internal attitudes to the challenges that life throws up for us

can leave us upset and complaining. We can struggle and struggle to free ourselves, and instead become more entrapped.

Jesus uses the imagery of the bronze serpent raised up. He teaches that he, like the serpent, will be raised up (though, of course, on a cross rather than a pole) and all who turn to look and believe in him will have eternal life. The serpent is perhaps a symbol of the temptation to sin, to live independent of God, going back to the Garden of Eden. Paul says Christ becomes our sin – our separation from God – in order to overcome sin on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ did not turn away from God, even when he was very afraid and the challenges to his life overwhelming. He still stayed turned toward God.

The invitation is not to turn in on ourselves when life is tough, turn into our personal darkness, but to turn towards Christ, trusting in his light, trusting in God's grace, beyond our own resources. As we look and trust we find ourselves healed and forgiven. And that foretaste of the 'peace beyond understanding; (Phil 4:7) sets us free to be our part of God's light shining in our corner of the world.

Hymn StF 55: Immortal, invisible, God only wise

- 1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.
- 2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might —
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.
- 3 To all life thou givest, to both great and small ;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all ;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish ; but naught changeth thee.

4 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

5 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 55 .

Prayers of intercession

On the leaders of the Church
as they make decisions about church opening
and mission activities for Passiontide and Easter:
Let your light shine,
and bring hope to your children.

On teachers, teaching assistants,
administrative staff and students
as they settle back into schools:
Let your light shine,
and bring hope to your children.

On those who feel isolated,
those who mourn loved ones,
and those who are ill...
Let your light shine,
and bring hope to your children.

Loving Lord, we look up to you
and trust that your light will guide us
in the path of peace, justice and love.
In the name of Jesus.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Loving God,
we humans are afraid of the darkness.
But, for you, darkness and light are alike,
and no problem.
You can see in the dark,
and we can put our hand in yours and trust you,
knowing that the light will dawn again –
in your time.
Amen.

Sunday 17th March 2024

A gathering prayer

Come, let us worship the God who loves every single different one of us, whoever and wherever we are, and invites us all into a covenant relationship based on love.

Hymn Stf 1: All people that on Earth do dwell

- 1 All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice :
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell ;
come ye before him and rejoice.
- 2 The Lord, ye know, is God indeed ;
without our aid he did us make :
we are his folk, he doth us feed ;
and for his sheep he doth us take.
- 3 O enter then his gates with praise ;
approach with joy his courts unto ;
praise, laud, and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.
- 4 For why, the Lord our God is good ;
his mercy is for ever sure ;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.
- 5 To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
the God whom heaven and earth adore,
from earth and from the angel host
be praise and glory evermore.

William Kethe (*d.*1594)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 1

A prayer of adoration

Lord Jesus Christ, we have so wanted to see you,
to meet you on life's path, to share our lives with you,
to walk and talk with you, to know you deep within.
Your love for us all, no matter what our colour or creed,
no matter what our age or gender, wealth or poverty,
brings us to our knees and we can do no other than adore you.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

Bible reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ "The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,"
declares the LORD.

³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time," declares the LORD.
"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.

"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

Reflection

There was an elderly widower in a care home. He was partially sighted. His hearing was failing and so was his short-term memory. And he was very tired after many years caring for his wife in her last illness. About once a fortnight the PAT (Pets As Therapy) dogs came to the care home. And one day it so happened that the woman who brought the PAT dog had two. There was an old dog winding down towards retirement, and a young dog she was training up to provide PAT services. The old dog knew the care home and its residents well. And when the lady went first, as she always did, to the communal lounge where the residents assembled, the dog knew where the elderly man always sat, and he made a beeline for him. The old man woke up, patted the dog on his head and smiled. Content and secure, the dog settled at his feet, and went to sleep. So did one cheered old gentleman. The young dog and his handler made their tour and the youngster revelled in being made a fuss of by a succession of residents. When the visit was over, the lady came back to the main lounge. Both dog and elderly man awoke. The dog panted. The old man patted his head again and smiled. The old dog trotted off with the woman, and the man went back to sleep.

Doesn't that story show that everyone, even every creature, however old or frail, has a role to play and can bring happiness, contentment, and a sense of purpose to another life? And isn't it a model for our covenant relationship with God, responding to God's care for us with care for one another and all of creation?

Prayers of intercession

As we remember all those who are adversely treated because of their place of origin or their skin tone, we pray for the time to come when all people will rejoice in the diversity of different colours and races, different cultures and backgrounds.
Your kingdom come
on earth as in heaven.

As we remember those who are vulnerable, frightened to leave their homes for fear of street crimes,

we pray for the time to come when violence will be no more
and all will live in security and safety.
Your kingdom come
on earth as in heaven.

As we remember those who have suffered abuse at the hands of friend
or stranger,
and who bear the scars physical, mental and emotional,
we pray for the time when all women and all men will respect each other,
and where children will not fear violence or abuse.
Your kingdom come
on earth as in heaven.

As we remember those who are alone and isolated,
those who mourn,
those who are ill and those who look after loved ones,
and as we especially remember...
we pray for the time when there will be no more pain or tears
and when all will live in full community.
Your kingdom come
on earth as in heaven.

Loving Lord, as we look upon each other
may we see your image which we all share;
may we love as we are loved,
and may we welcome as we have been welcomed by you.
In your name we pray.
Amen.

A sending out prayer

Thank you, God, for each and every one of your amazing people,
every one of them unique.
We go out joyful, knowing that your love is always there for us
and reaches to every place and part of the whole world,
and all the millions and billions of people, in every generation.
May that inspire and encourage us
to be loving to all whom we meet in our day-to-day living.
Amen.

Palm Sunday, 24th March 2024

Call to worship

Jesus is king!
King of creation, of all nations, of our lives!
Let us worship with joy, gratitude, and respect.
Hosanna to the Son of David,
to God's Anointed One!
Hosanna to the king who rides a peaceable donkey!
Hosanna here and in the highest!

Bible reading: Mark 11:1-11

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Reflection

What does the idea of a king offer? Leadership? Just symbolic leadership? Or something more? What do you think people were expecting from the one who came, 'in the name of the Lord'? What did the name of his ancestor David add, I wonder? Glamour? Charisma? The mantle of a kind of 'superman' if you think of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17), or the romance of a kind of Cinderella fantasy if you focus on the choice of the youngest and least regarded brother, the shepherd boy, as king (1 Samuel 16)? A poet who gloriously lamented the death of his friend, Jonathan (2 Samuel 1; 17)? A warrior king who made Israel great? If there was also scandal (2 Samuel 11:14), and tragedy (2 Samuel 18; 33), they perhaps weren't coming to mind on that day! But overall, in David, we have the picture of a many-faceted but undoubtedly great man who served his people well. Does this picture help us at all to understand Jesus as king?

The UK got a new king last year, and the transition from the late Queen Elizabeth II to King Charles III has provoked some discussion of the acceptability of kingship in the modern world. It would probably be fair to say that we are happier with humility, romance and peaceable arts than with battle prowess, ambition, or a colourful past! Perhaps the essentials of Jesus as servant king of his people, humble on a donkey, acclaimed with peaceable palms, not the weapons of war, have gradually rubbed off on earthly monarchs down the years as they internalise the meaning of their anointing as servants of God and a nation. Modern British constitutional monarchy, crystallised in the late Queen, has been displayed in service, tact, self-restraint, concern for suffering, and the sponsorship of good causes and peace between nations.

But surely this is not enough to imagine the kind of king Jesus is? There is 'soft power' in King Jesus, certainly. Seemingly the sheer appeal of his personality brought people out to line the roads and shout, 'Hosanna'! But there was hard power, too, principally seen later when he drives the merchants out of the Temple but hinted at even on Palm Sunday. He gives his orders, and the disciples carry them out. With everything else, calm, certain, dignified – even on a donkey – he has the qualities of a good commanding officer.

In the end, there is no possible full comparison for Jesus' version of kingship. He shows both the compassion that wills an end, and wins hearts, and the strength of purpose that achieves it, by force if necessary. But he also had that perfection of motive, which meant that

neither hard power, nor soft power, was ever used for selfish purposes. And that, none of us, king or commoner, will ever achieve. But, strengthened by the grace that God alone gives, we can go on trying in our imperfect ways to follow our utterly selfless divine example.

Prayer of adoration

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord of lords, King of kings,
your love for us transforms and startles us.
Your gift to us amazes and bewilders us.
Your life given for us brings us to our knees.
Your abundance reveals our poverty.
Your presence comforts and upholds us.
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord of lords, King of kings,
We adore you like no other.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 264: Make way, make way

1 Make way, make way, for Christ the King
in splendour arrives ;
fling wide the gates and welcome him
into your lives.

*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),
for the King of kings (for the King of kings) ;
make way (make way), make way (make way),
and let his Kingdom in.*

2 He comes the broken hearts to heal,
the prisoners to free ;
the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,
the blind shall see.

3 And those who mourn with heavy hearts,
who weep and sigh,
with laughter, joy and royal crown
he'll beautify.

4 We call you now to worship him
as Lord of all,
to have no gods before him,
their thrones must fall!

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers of intercession

Praise the Lord:
Hosanna.

We praise and thank you for signs of spring; for crocuses and daffodils,
and all the green shoots of growth.

We pray for gardeners; for those who look after parks and public verges;
for those who keep our streets clean and make our communities more
pleasant.

Praise the Lord:
Hosanna.

We praise and thank you for the message of hope, encouragement and
peace that Jesus brings. We pray for those who are fearful for the future,
those who have lost direction in life and those whose lives are troubled.
We especially pray for...

Praise the Lord:
Hosanna.

Lord Jesus, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord –
blessed for all you are; blessed for all you do.

Receive our prayers and speak to the needs of all your children, we
pray.

Amen.

A sending out prayer

As the crowds gathered to welcome and celebrate the coming kingdom
of freedom, peace and justice, so we lay ourselves before our donkey-
riding king, Jesus Christ our Lord. Let his vision be our vision, his
kingdom be our kingdom, his call be our call, his journey be our journey,
and his life, death and resurrection be our salvation.

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Amen.

Easter Sunday, 31st March 2024

Call to worship

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Let us celebrate with Easter joy! Not out of habit. Not thinking only about chocolate and fun, but with a brand new awareness of Christ's presence with us as our loving and risen Lord!

Lord of the Church, Lord of our lives, and Lord of the world:

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Bible readings: Mark 16:1-8

Jesus Has Risen

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Acts 10:34-43

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Hymn Stf 313: Thine be the glory

1 Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won ;
angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes
where thy body lay :
*Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

2 Lo, Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb ;

lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom ;
let the Church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth,
death hath lost its sting :

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 :

Edmond Budry (1854–1932)

translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875–1939)

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Prayers of thanksgiving

Lent and Holy Week is gone, that journey over.
Maundy Thursday called us to service and devotion.
Good Friday pained us and stained us and drained us.
Saturday stopped us in our tracks, reflecting.
Easter Day brings us resurrection that never will be over.
Christ is risen for us and within us.
Beyond the fluffy chicks and Easter eggs there is life in all its fullness.
In the midst of our joys and delight:
In the midst of suffering and pain:
God is with us, God within us.
Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to our risen Lord.
Amen.

Reflection

Mark tells us that Christ was not in the quiet tomb. He was, and is, out there in the world's action. In Acts, Peter draws us a picture of Christ at the heart of human sin, suffering for all on the Cross. Sometimes it is difficult to bring together Easter joy – Christ raised, death conquered, the sins of the world blotted out – with the need to find God where human

suffering continues. The proposition that Christ's death wiped out human sin, eclipsed its significance, became to my late mother a theological blind alley where she found her faith threatened. She saw the pictures and heard the stories coming out of Auschwitz, thrusting before her the immense cruelty human beings could inflict on other human beings. Like the women, perhaps, she saw only the darkness of the tomb. At that point Christ's death offered no answer to the sufferings of millions, mostly Jews. The resurrection seemed unreal.

With the war in Ukraine, our generation has been confronted with something of the same horror and the same challenge. How is it, if the world has been changed forever by love's triumph at Easter, that atrocities are still committed, innocents are still slaughtered? How do we make sense of it? How can we permit ourselves the luxury of Easter joy while death and suffering are still rampant in the world?

Just telling broken people to find comfort in faith is futile. Faith is not just a rosy glow to be enjoyed, even when shared. It must spur us to action, because Christ's victory works through his disciples. Those women found their faith together, and told Peter, told the disciples, and the world heard. There was more suffering. And more glory. With every generation we have to take the fight afresh to the powers of evil with Christ alongside us. He goes before us and meets us where we need to be.

What Easter gives us is not the forever banishment of suffering, but the forever power to somehow wring good out of it – by showing compassion; by fighting for truth and for change; by supporting the victims; and by resisting with everything faith, love and hope can offer those who would continue oppressing others. And by giving thanks wholeheartedly, for the strength that has been given to us to keep on doing!

Prayer of intercession

We pray for one another, our families,
our communities, our church fellowships.

May we support those who are unwell or grieving.

May we bring fresh hope to those who feel forgotten and are vulnerable,
and may we – both practically and prayerfully – share our faith
in your Son Jesus in whose name we entrust these prayers to you.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Easter joy is to be shared,
to be grown, to be treasured.
As we go out into the world and a new week,
may that joy be our strength, our inspiration,
and our refuge in trouble.

Amen.