

Worship for Easter Sunday (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Christ is risen
He is risen indeed
Alleluia

Welcome to our Easter Sunday Service; a day to celebrate, to shout alleluia and to sing with joy. We thank all who have been involved in the preparation of this service – Rev Barbara Greenwood for the sermon, Candy Evans and Russell Blackwell for the readings and those clever people who put all the pieces together. I am Margaret Weir and I am worship leader today.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

The long wait is over
 The tomb is empty
 The grave clothes folded
 The alleluias are alive
 Jesus is risen
 Alleluia

Hymn: StF 306 – Now the green blade rises

1. **Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
 wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
 Love lives again, that with the dead has lain:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.***
2. **In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,
 thinking that he never would awake again,
 laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:**

Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

3. **Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
 he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
 quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.***
4. **When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
 then your touch can call us back to life again,
 fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.***

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872 – 1958)
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Opening Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, we can only begin to imagine the wonder and relief in Mary's eyes as she met your living presence in the Garden on that first Easter morning, and ran to share the Good News with the other disciples.

We, too, want to feel that excitement as we celebrate that Jesus who was dead is alive, that good is stronger than evil, that love is stronger than hatred, that life is stronger than death and that you Lord are with us to the end of time.

On this day of light and gladness we come to worship you.

As we look at the cross – we see that it points upwards to our Creator God, downwards to men, but it points outwards too.

Holy Spirit help us to express our worship in your world today
by reaching out to others,
by reflecting Jesus' compassion
and by sharing God's amazing love in all the ways we can.

And as we draw nearer to you in worship, our Living Lord, we want to say sorry for all the times we forget or ignore your living presence with us.

For those times when we allow our own selfish wants to dominate our thoughts and rule our lives.

For all those times we have been uncaring and unwilling to forgive others,
Lord, please forgive us.

The Lord hears our prayer, Thanks be to God.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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

Hymn: StF 297 – Christ is alive. Let Christians sing

- 1. Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and home 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,
Christ 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 Wren (b 1936)

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THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Acts 10:34-43 (NIVUK)

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John

preached – ³⁸how 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, ⁴⁰but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹He 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. ⁴²He 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. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’

Gospel John 20:1-16 (NIVUK)

The Empty Tomb

¹Early 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. ²So 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!’

³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to

rise from the dead.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³They 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.’ ¹⁴At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

¹⁵He asked her, ‘Woman, 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.’

¹⁶Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means ‘Teacher’).

Sermon

Change is part of life. Sometimes it is so slow as to be imperceptible, only visible when looking back – like the ways in which our bodies change as we get older. Sometimes it is sudden and dramatic, forcing a change in our behaviour, our understanding, and even in our beliefs.

We have two examples of such sudden, dramatic change in our readings today. Our passage from Acts follows on from Peter seeing a vision of a sheet containing all kinds of unclean animals and hearing God’s voice telling him to kill and eat. To a devout Jew, for whom avoiding unclean food was central to his faith, this was earth-shattering. Peter immediately understood that

the vision was not about dietary laws, it was about people – the people whom God accepts.

Then came the invitation to the house of Cornelius. That's where Peter was when he delivered the speech we heard in our reading, starting with that fantastic statement: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

Peter went on to tell the story of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, and while he was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on the people listening, as he had done on the disciples on the day of Pentecost. If Peter had not heeded the vision and changed his view, he would never have gone to that house, never have preached that sermon, and the Holy Spirit would not have come to those Gentiles. Maybe you and I would not be followers of Jesus now, if the straitjacket of strict adherence to Jewish law had not been broken.

In our Gospel reading, Mary goes to the tomb intending to anoint Jesus' body, but instead meets him, risen and glorious. Grief turns to joy and doubt to faith. Far from the ending she thought had happened, Mary sees a new beginning, one which as yet she can have no idea of the magnitude of.

Both Peter and Mary, after those momentous encounters, go away to tell others what they have heard and seen. Sometimes the message is received with joy, at other times rejected. But they can't stop telling it, because the encounter with the voice of God for Peter, and with the risen Jesus for Mary, has changed everything.

This is our second Easter in lockdown, without the familiarity of shared worship, of communion on Easter Day and singing Thine Be the Glory at the top of our lungs. The past year has brought

many changes: some abrupt and shocking ones; others which have been gradual and almost imperceptible. I remember listening to news of areas of Italy where people were being told to stay at home and not allowed to travel outside their town and thinking it could never happen here, but here we are. I remember the first time I saw someone walking down the street near our house wearing a face mask, thinking that it was overkill and a bit ridiculous. Now, it's normal, and it's the people not wearing masks who surprise me. I remember 18 months ago the suggestion that services in our churches be videoed, with the recordings made available to people who couldn't attend, and being utterly horrified at the suggestion. You won't catch me in front of a camera!! And yet here I am. A year ago I would have been horrified by the suggestion that a funeral should be live streamed or recorded. Now – it's a sensible, compassionate and practical response to an awful situation.

Things happen which change our behaviour, our understanding, and even our beliefs. The question is: when circumstances change again and it becomes possible to go back to how things used to be, will we do that, or will we develop a new way, which honours the new understanding we gained in the time of turmoil and marries it to the freedom we are all looking forward to so much.

Early on in the pandemic, signs appeared on the noticeboards of various churches saying: the building is closed, but the Church is alive. The Church has continued to worship and serve and offer pastoral care, as best we can. Along the way, online worship and recorded worship and printed worship have become familiar. Some of us have learned new skills and picked up new

knowledge. What will we do with them, once the buildings start to open again?

The Jesus who Mary met at the tomb was not the same as the one who had gone to the cross. He was alive, but different – in a way which the wise theologian will not try to be too precise about. But that difference makes all the difference. When our churches open again, will we try to make them just the same as they were before all this happened? Or will our understanding of what Church is, and is for, have changed?

What have you missed most during this time? What have you valued most out of what church and the circuit have offered over the past year? Has your church perhaps been able to connect with people outside the normal Sunday fellowship – remember that God shows no partiality, God loves and accepts all people from every nation who fear him and do what is right. Remember that all of us in our time have done things which were not right; that's why Jesus went to the cross and was raised again. God has given us a second chance, the opportunity to start again. Who are we to deny that chance to others? Shouldn't we, in gratitude, be doing all we can to spread the good news of God's love, demonstrated supremely in the death of Jesus. I'm sure Peter must have found those Gentiles a bit uncouth in the way they went about things. But he found it in his heart to accept them and fellowship with them – because God had changed his heart. The acceptance came first, and then the Holy Spirit.

What would you hope your local church to be and become, post-Covid, post-resurrection? It can't be exactly the same, can it? Perhaps it shouldn't be exactly the same. How are you going to engage with worship and service and social activities, once they are possible again?

You may have found benefits in being able to worship at home – would you want to continue that for some of the time, or even all of the time? If so – what needs to change about the way the local church works, so that it can still be there for those who do want to worship in person, while providing for those who need or want to stay at home?

Lots of question. Peter and Mary had lots of questions – but they were answered in those deep and personal encounters with the living God, which changed them for ever. May you encounter that same God today – in this time of worship, or perhaps when you go for a walk, or when you talk to someone. May you encounter the God who carries us through all kind of change, and brings us out the other side into a new and different reality.

Hymn: StF 309 - See, what a morning

- 1. See what a morning, gloriously bright
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the grave-clothes
Tomb filled with light,
As the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan, wrought in love,
Borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man, for He lives,
Christ is risen from the dead!**
- 2. See Mary weeping: 'Where is He laid?
As in sorrow she turns from the empty
tomb;
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name:
It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years,
Speaking life, stirring hope,
Bringing peace to us,
Will sound till He appears,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!**

**3. One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
Through the Spirit
Who clothes faith with certainty, Honour
and blessing, glory and praise To the King
crowned with power and authority!
And we are raised with Him, Death is dead,
love has won Christ has conquered;
And we shall reign with Him,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!**

Stuart Townend (b 1963) and Keith Getty (b 1974)
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Cook.

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord Jesus Christ,
On this day of joy
We give You heartfelt thanks from our full
hearts.

We bring to You our prayers this day
For a world needing Easter.

We pray for those locked in by hurt, and
loneliness and grief.

We pray for those locked in by addiction, and
hunger, and poverty.

We pray that we, inspired by Your Good News
this Easter Day, may bring our practical care and
help to those who call out, and to those who are
silent,

Today we pray for our nation,
for our Queen,
and for those who shape the future of our
country and our world.

In times of uncertainty make us confident with
kindness.

In times of frustration, make us gentle with
vision.

Help us to be the Easter people bringing light
into our world.

This Easter Day, this new beginning, this time of
lifting up,
lift up our heads and hearts,
lift up our eyes and voices
for our Lord Jesus Christ is risen!
And there is hope!
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Blessing the offering

We celebrate the miracle of resurrection,
and we recognise the need for new life in the
world around us.

We are your people Lord, the people of new life
– help us to use our gifts to inspire new life, to
enable resurrection, by the Spirit of the living
God.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

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.

*Thine be the glory,
Risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory
Thou o'er death hast won!*

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:

*Thine be the glory,
Risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory
Thou o'er death hast won!*

Edmond Budry (1854 – 1932)

translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875 – 1939)

Prayer & blessing

We go into the world
To walk in God's light
To rejoice in God's love
And to reflect God's glory
Amen

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StF 306 – Now the green blade rises

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StF 297 – Christ is alive. Let Christians sing

Brian Wren (b 1936)

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*If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on
swc.katetennyson@gmail.com*