

Worship at St. John's for Sunday 18th April 2021, 3rd Sunday of Easter

Introduction

As we continue to celebrate Easter and the Resurrection, we look today at two less well known readings for the season: Jesus's appearance in the upper room following the return to Jerusalem of the two who met the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus; and Peter's sermon to the crowd following the healing of a lame man at the Temple gate. We will focus on the message of the reality of the Resurrection and the impact that it has to give New Life and to bring about faith, repentance and reconciliation. We keep a moment's quiet.

Call to worship

Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.'

In worship, let us come to the one who offers peace and rest.

The hymn, 'This Joyful Eastertide', sung on the video by St. Martin's Voices. The words are not easy to follow but repay either a light reading letting the feel take over or an effort to read more deeply and appreciate what is being said.

This joyful Eastertide,
away with sin and sorrow.
My Love, the Crucified,
has sprung to life this morrow:

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
Ne'er burst his three-day prison,
Our faith had been in vain:
But now hath Christ arisen,
Arisen, arisen, arisen!*

My flesh in hope shall rest,
and for a season slumber:
till trump from east to west:
shall wake the dead in number:

Chorus

Death's flood hath lost its chill,
since Jesus crossed the river:
lover of souls, from ill
my passing soul deliver:

Chorus

George Ratcliffe Woodward (1848-1934)

Let us pray

Against the noise of the world we cover our ears; at distressing sights we close our eyes; to confusing thoughts we close our minds; amid the clamour of distress we close our hearts. Loving God, your ears and eyes are ever open to our needs; help us to worship with open hearts and minds, that we may have open ears and eyes to see the work that you call us to do, and open hands to do it. **Amen.**

Lord God, whose arms are always open to us, we come before you today with hearts and minds open to receive your teaching.

Lead us to understand who you are and what you have done, and what you require of us as witnesses. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Lord, who understands our every need, we adore you for saying to our troubled souls, "Peace be with you."

Lord, you have always been our host. When you first came from heaven to the world we call ours, shepherds and kings were your guests. When you accepted hospitality

in the homes of others, you turned the tables and became the host, feeding hearts and souls through your teaching. When you came to the disciples, newly risen, you took charge and saw to their needs of mind and body. We praise you, Jesus, ground of our being, ground of our believing, for standing among us in your risen power, host to the world that is yours – not ours.

Amen.

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

God, we confess that when distress comes knocking at our door, all that we have learned and should know goes flying out of the window. Our minds in disarray, we fail to turn to trusted sources of help. Forgive us for forgetting how to seek you. We forget your sustaining word in Scripture, your presence when we turn to you in prayer, the calm that is to be found when we seek you in community. We are sorry for turning in on ourselves, our minds going round in circles. Come, risen Lord, break the cycle of our despair.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Our understanding is dark, clouded by dismay, fearful and lacking in faith, yet we know that you will understand, Lord. Shine your light on us and banish the dark thoughts that overwhelm us; forgive us the deeds committed while fearful and bewildered, and lead us forward in the light of your love. **Amen.**

Reading Acts 3.12-19 Peter and John have just invoked the Name of Jesus in the the healing of the lame man at the gate of the Temple. A crowd has gathered and Peter speaks to them.

¹² When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷ "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.

Gospel Reading Luke 24.36-48 The two who walked to Emmaus, where they encounter the Risen Christ, return to Jerusalem to tell the disciples.

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch

me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Reflection

Let us pray: God of New Life we thank you for these readings we have shared and ask the help of your Spirit in our understanding and in our working out of them in our lives. And may the words written here and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and Life. Amen

In the very first Easter sermon I preached, I quoted Archbishop Michael Ramsey in referring to the Resurrection as “an event that occurred” –the inverted commas were significant. Here was an Archbishop seeming to question the reality of the ‘event’. I went on to talk of another Bishop –the Bishop of Durham who was caught up in controversy about the Resurrection. Bishop David Jenkins had said the Resurrection was “**not** a conjuring trick with bones” but was quoted as saying it was. Both Bishops’ point was whatever, questions there may be about what actually happened, the Resurrection is **real** and that has consequences.

Our two readings today speak of the reality and significance of the Resurrection. I’ve not done the research but I would not be surprised if this last resurrection appearance we hear about in Luke is the least preached on resurrection passage. We are very familiar with the women (Mary) at the tomb, or Peter and the beloved disciple running to the tomb. Then of course there are other accounts of the upper room appearances and Thomas, that we thought about last week and the appearance at the lakeside (incidentally, Luke’s account here shares a lot in common with those). Even when it is used I suspect it is as part of what proceeds it (the road to Emmaus) or what follows (the Luke’s Gospel account of Ascension). It is here however we see much of significance.

Similarly the portion of the story from Acts is perhaps less well known than what precedes it (the healing of the lame man at the Temple gate) and is perhaps not the best known of Peter’s sermons. Both passages place the Resurrection in the context of the Jewish Scriptures, both speaking of witnessing and both speak of the Newness of Life through repentance and faith that is possible because of the Resurrection.

In the Gospel reading the Risen Christ appears even though the door is locked and not surprisingly the disciples are frightened. They are gently rebuked for the fear. By inviting the disciples to look at the hands and feet and even to touch two things are shown (also reinforced by the eating of fish): this is no phantom, but a flesh and blood person (albeit able to appear and disappear) and this person is none other than Jesus, who was killed on the Cross. The text then speaks of the disciples being

reminded of Jesus's words to them and they are taken through the scriptures –as a whole rather than individual proof text, would seem to be the implication by describing them as the Law of Moses (i.e. the first five books of the bible) the prophets and the Psalms (possibly all the 'writings'). What they are shown is that the way of Suffering (including the cross) and of being raised is an essential part of the nature of God revealed in the Messiah. What follows from that is repentance and forgiveness is to be preached to the whole world, beginning with them as witnesses to these events.

Peter's sermon in Acts follows very similar lines. Peter begins by pointing to Jesus, and not his and John's supposed piety. Peter is not afraid to rebuke the people for their killing of Jesus (but this is a sadness rather than an anger) and is about the place of the Cross in the understanding of God's love. Then he affirms the reality of the Resurrection as the vindication of God's love in Christ, to which he and John are witnesses. This and faith in this is where the power to heal has come from. Having previously identified God as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and our ancestors who glorified Jesus he now asserts that the prophets point to the suffering and rising. The consequence is a call to repent.

What is our response to the Resurrection? For some there may be doubts as to what actually happened. Conversely there are those who seem to require a belief in very specific events. What our readings show is that God's loving interacting with creation and people in particular is a continuum but that something very New happens in the Cross and Resurrection (and we might want to add the Ascension and the giving of the Spirit) and that people are changed and empowered. The angry, then denying, then frightened Peter, becomes the courageous caller out of injustice, without anger at the abusers, able to take personal abuse and not respond in anger; the one who speaks and acts in the power of the risen Christ. This is what the **reality** of the Resurrection does.

Our world and individuals need that reconciling power: disputes between 'the West' and China or Russia; tensions on policing of Black people in the USA or of protests in this country; children and young people being used in riots in Northern Ireland; families not speaking to one another; and so on and so on –not to mention climate change!

Prince Phillip (whose funeral will have happened when you read this) may not have been as well known for his Christian faith as the Queen but he was a very strong advocate of faith in action, particularly in relation to the natural world, convening conferences and setting up an organisation bring different faiths together to act. The Queen will be comforted by her faith, especially the Resurrection, at this time of mourning and I am sure she is proud of what her husband's life of service gave. Within the Royal family we are led to believe there is a need for that reconciling power of the Resurrection, perhaps the sadness and the grateful remembrance that is currently surrounding them may be a time when the New Life of the Resurrection may come to them again.

'Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ... "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.' **Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Lord God who has called us to faith, in faith we pray for the needs of others.
For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray.

Today, we pray for our Queen, who has ruled for as long as many of us can remember, and longer than many of us have lived. In her loss and her grief may she find comfort in the companionship of others, support from family and friends, and strength in her faith in God and life eternal. For all of the Royal family in their grief and change of circumstance, some taking up new responsibilities in new ways and with new purpose, and in their support and upholding of each other.

For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray.

For all who grieve for the loss of loved ones, family or friends, near or far away. Especially those who are bereaved a long way from family who can't travel to be with them to offer comfort and support. In their loss, in their grief, in their solitude may they find a calm centre and be upheld by their faith, their friendship and their neighbours.

For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray.

We pray for those of faith and those of no faith, for those with purpose and those with no purpose in life. For those who have a clear direction and those who flounder uncertain for life in all its complexities. For those whose mental health causes them pain, anguish, confusion and loneliness, for those who feel abandoned, unwanted, unloved and un-helped.

For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray.

For countries at war with other countries and within themselves, for their people who fear for their lives and stability, for those made homeless and jobless and offered nothing but an uncertain future. For those countries where violence comes all too easily to the fore and where it is hard to grasp the real reason behind it.

Remembering countries at war where their people are damaged, isolated, abused, for Myanmar, Ethiopia, Mozambique and closer to home for the people of Ireland and Northland Ireland, for Catholics and Protestants, those of faith and those of none.

For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray.

For Christians trying to work out the best way to live out their lives, true to their faith, to the Gospel, to their calling. Trying in these days to do the best they can, pulled this way and that. Trying to look beyond the present to the future, beyond their immediate neighbourhood to the world wide family, for we are all God's children. Help us to catch a wider more inclusive vision of the needs of the world and its people for unless we are all fed no one is satisfied, unless we are all inoculated no one is safe.

For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray.

For countries with surging Covid cases, for those with poor infrastructure and resources, for countries with little PPE and no vaccines and no realistic prospect of

national immunisation any time soon. For those engaged in trying to resolve such issues no matter what faith, colour, creed, it is their need that needs to be met along with providing sufficient food and housing, safety and stability.

For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray.

For ourselves we pray that our ears may be used to hear the cries of the needy, that our eyes be used to see the needs around us, that our voices be used to speak up for the marginalised and the poor, that our hands be used to reach out in comfort and that our lives be used to improve the lives of others.

For the world and its people,

Lord, we pray. Amen.

Hymn Now the green blade rises, sung on the video by St. Martin's Voices

- 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 been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.
- 2 In the grave they laid him, Love whom men had 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,
back 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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Final Prayer

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Peace be with you' – they responded with turmoil.

Jesus said, 'Have you anything to eat?' – they served him fish.

Jesus opened their minds – they became his witnesses.

So, Lord, may we too find peace in your service, with opened minds and hearts on fire.

Amen.

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