

Sunday 18 April 2021 – 3rd Sunday of Easter
Order of service

Welcome to this service for the 3rd Sunday of Easter!

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We are witnesses,
to the love God has poured into us.
We are witnesses of God's love,
sharing it with each person we meet.
We are witnesses to everyone we encounter,
little children like us,
sisters and brothers in God's family.

Hymn – StF 297 / H&P 190– Christ is alive! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qqaw-VzM7ms>

OR StF 21 / H&P 486 - Born in Song!

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| <p>1 Christ is alive ! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.</p> <p>2 Christ is alive ! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> |
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- Brian Wren (*b.* 1936)

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Loving God, we praise you once more for the Good News of Easter, that Christ is alive,
and brings new hope, new joy, new life.

We praise you for what we see in the resurrection stories –
your love that could not be kept down; your purpose that could not be defeated;
your goodness that could not be destroyed.

Teach us that what was true then is true now –
that resurrection is not just about life after death,
but about constant new beginnings,
the way you are able to transform every part of our lives,
the way you are always bringing renewal.

Remind us once more through this season,

That in all the changes and chances of this world

You are an unchanging rock, and unfailing deliverer, and an everlasting hope.

Lord Jesus Christ,

Forgive us that so often we forget that you have given us this Good News to share.

Having experienced your risen presence, we keep it to ourselves.

Having met with you, we fail to introduce others to you in turn.
Having received so much, we have shared so little.
Forgive us, and renew us, we pray. (adapted from prayers by Nick Fawcett)

The Lord's Prayer.

The story in our first reading from the third chapter of Acts, immediately follows the account of a man being healed by Peter and John at the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem:

Reading – Acts 3: 12-19

Hymn StF 463 / H&P 447 – Deep in the shadows of the past

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fBnZ0C8Tj4>

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| <p>1 Deep in the shadows of the past,
far out from settled lands,
some nomads travelled with their God
across the desert sands.
The dawning hope of humankind
by them was sensed and shown :
a promise calling them ahead,
a future yet unknown.</p> <p>2 While others bowed to changeless gods,
they met a mystery,
invisible, without a name :
'I AM WHAT I WILL BE';
and by their tents, around their fires,
in story, song and law,
they praised, remembered, handed on
a past that promised more.</p> | <p>3 From Exodus to Pentecost
the promise changed and grew,
while some, remembering the past,
recorded what they knew,
or with their letters and laments,
their prophecy and praise,
recovered, kindled and expressed
new hope for changing days.</p> <p>4 For all the writings that survived,
for leaders, long ago,
who sifted, copied, and preserved
the Bible that we know,
give thanks, and find its story yet
our promise, strength and call,
the model of emerging faith,
alive with hope for all.</p> |
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Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Sometimes we're so familiar with the story of the Resurrection that we forget how amazing it is. In this dialogue, a writer struggles with making his story believable.

Dialogue – “They won't believe it” (This is on the video circulated)

by Paul S. Glass, “Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary, Volume 9: Dramatic Dialogues”, publ. Epworth Press 2003

We are on the third Sunday of Easter, but the gospel reading for today continues the story of the first Easter Day! The two from Emmaus have just arrived breathless in Jerusalem, to tell the gathered disciples that they had met Jesus and recognised him when he broke bread. Then the story continues:

Gospel reading – Luke 24: 36-48

Sermon – Tell me a story

"Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin"

If you're over a certain age, you'll probably recognise those words from BBC Radio's *Listen with Mother* programme. As a very small child, I loved hearing them because it meant that someone was about to tell a story.

1. God's Story

Today we're thinking about stories.

In the gospel reading we heard, the resurrected Jesus has shown up among those first disciples, and wants to be sure they recognize that it's really him:

"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."

and then, it says,

"he opened their minds to understand the scriptures."

He had done a similar Bible study earlier that day, with the two friends on the road to Emmaus.

In several stories the Risen Jesus sat with the disciples and opened up the scriptures.

But notice that Jesus didn't use *individual* verses to show that scripture had been fulfilled in him. His claim is that the sum total of *all* the Scripture has now come to fruition in accordance with God's plan of salvation.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by many different people over many centuries. Some of the books recount events of many generations ago. Some are in the form of poetry, or letters, or wise advice.

But Christians believe that in spite of this immense variation of style, authorship and date, the Bible tells **one over-arching story – the story of God.**

We usually read the Bible in small bites, but we need to understand how they fit in to the big story. There are lots of resources available that will help you understand how the different parts of the Bible make up one narrative.

We sometimes forget how many people today do not know the stories that make up the big story. If you are involved in *Open the Book* or *RE Inspired*, you will know how exciting it is to visit schools, and tell children and young people, perhaps for the first time, the stories of God.

Yes, everyone loves stories. My favourite stories include the 7 books by C S Lewis that make up *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The most famous one, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, tells of a magical land reached through a wardrobe by a group of children.

Aslan, the great lion, is the wonderful, yet frightening King of this land, who sacrifices himself to save Narnia from the white witch.

In another of the chronicles, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lucy has bravely agreed to save the lives of the group by going into the Magician's library to read the book of spells. She turns the magic pages:

On the next page she came to a spell 'for the refreshment of the spirit'. And what Lucy found herself reading was more like a story than a spell. It went on for three pages and before she had read to the bottom of the page she had forgotten that she was reading at all. She was living in the story as if it were real, and all the pictures were real, too. When she had got to the third page and come to the end, she said 'That is the loveliest story I've ever read or ever shall read in my whole life. Oh, I wish I could have gone on reading it for ten years. At least I'll read it over again.'

But here, part of the magic of the Book came into play. You couldn't turn back. The right-hand pages, the ones ahead, could be turned; the left-hand pages could not.

'Oh, what a shame!' said Lucy. 'I did so want to read it again. Well, at least I must remember it. Let's see ... it was about ... about ... oh dear, it's all fading away again. And even this last page is going blank. This is a very peculiar book. How can I have forgotten? It was about a cup and a sword and a tree and a green hill, I know that much. But I can't remember and what shall I do?'

And she never could remember; and ever since that day what Lucy means by a good story is a story which reminds her of the forgotten story in the Magician's Book.

- a story about a cup and a sword and a tree and a green hill.

2. Your story as part of God's story

As a teenager, I joined a Methodist youth club, and started going to church on Sunday evenings, sitting in the gallery with my friends, and sometimes messing about. Then, after I came to know the risen Jesus for myself, suddenly the minister became a much better preacher! He talked about the Bible in such a way that was understandable, and was relevant to everyday life.

Of course, it *wasn't* the minister who had changed, but me. Like Lucy reading the Magician's Book, I was now *living* in the story of the Bible. Now that I knew Jesus as Saviour and Lord, the Holy Spirit was opening my eyes and giving me understanding.

Our reading from Acts 3 described Peter explaining the miraculous healing, by reminding his Jewish hearers of the story of their faith, and then going on to tell the story of Jesus. As he did so, he interpreted the story, and he placed everyone listening, *into* the story.

The Bible is more than a collection of stories; more even than God's story. The story has meaning; it is truth. Rob Bell explains it like this:

We live in the metaphors. The story of David and Goliath continues to speak to us because we know the David part of the story – we have lived it. The tomb is empty because we have met the risen Christ – we have experienced Jesus in a way that transcends space and time.

(“Velvet Elvis” by Rob Bell)

Our story is part of God's story. When we read or hear scripture, we identify with it. “We live in the metaphors.”

I encourage you to check out the Bible Society website, and look for “My Bible”, where dozens of ordinary people tell their stories, and how they recognise their own story in God's story. <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/mybible/>

3. TELLING YOUR STORY (YOU ARE WITNESSES)

In both our Bible readings today, we hear the word ‘witnesses’.

Luke 24: 45-8

Then [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 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, 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.**’

Acts 3: 14-15

¹⁴But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this **we are witnesses.**’

So what is a witness?

Many years ago, I was a youth worker, and was asked to appear as a character witness for a teenager in my youth club. He was a well-behaved club member who had been charged with stealing something from a friend. During the court hearing, before I was called to speak, I discovered that he wasn't quite the polite, helpful young man I knew, and he had previously

been convicted of other offences. I was temporarily rather disconcerted, but then decided that I just had to be truthful to what I knew of the boy, regardless of what he'd done before I knew him.

Being a witness is simply telling your story - it means saying what you have seen and experienced and know to be true.

When Jesus says, "You are witnesses", he's calling us to tell the story of how our lives have been drawn into God's story.

We are not *all* called to be preachers, or Bible scholars, or evangelists, but we *are* all witnesses.

Some Christians say that they don't have a story to tell. Maybe that's because they think it has to be a dramatic conversion story, or an account of a miracle.

But just as a witness in court can only testify to what they have experienced and seen, and no more, so it is that your story, however mundane you think it is, is the story Jesus needs you to tell.

A Scottish preacher posed this question, "What exactly has Christ done for you? What is there in your life that needs Christ to explain it, and that, apart from Him, simply could not have been there at all? If there is nothing, then your religion is a sheer futility."

So, what is there in *your* life that needs Christ to explain it? That's your story.

If you've never told it, try putting it into everyday language, maybe writing it down.

Think about questions such as: how different do you think your life would be if you didn't know Jesus?

Many people aren't particularly interested in church in any sense.

But they will often listen to an honest story.

And they will listen to you, if you've listened carefully to *them*.

People are far more willing to *listen*, once they have been *heard*.

And believe that the Holy Spirit goes before us.

You have no idea how someone you know may have already been touched by God, and is cautiously open to hearing your story.

You are witnesses.

In 1980, in San Salvador, the Roman Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero was brutally murdered. He had been an unlikely martyr, but after he became archbishop, he began to witness the violence, repression and injustices of the ruling government. He began to speak out and to challenge those in power, defending the poor and the marginalised. He had been fearful for the future of the church. He prepared the people in case the government closed down radio stations and newspapers, and killed all the priests and bishops. If that happens, he said:

"each one of you must be God's microphone,
each one of you must be a messenger,
a prophet.

The church will always exist

as long as there is one baptized person.

And that one baptized person who is left in the world

is responsible before the world for holding aloft

the banner of the Lord's truth

and of his divine justice."

Oscar Romero

May God give us courage to tell the story. Amen.

Hymn StF 418 / H&P 465 - We have a gospel to proclaim

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-SPYAgCtkw>

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| 1 We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth ;
the gospel of a Saviour's name :
we sing his glory, tell his worth. | 4 Tell of that glorious Easter morn :
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory. |
| 2 Tell of his birth at Bethlehem —
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all. | 5 Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died. |
| 3 Tell of his death at Calvary :
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave. | 6 Now we rejoice to name him King :
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim :
we sing his glory, tell his worth. |

Edward Joseph Burns (b. 1938)

Prayers of intercession

As always, this service is being prepared for circulation early in the week. Please include prayers for people and situations appropriate to your context, and to up-to-date news items.

In the power of the resurrection we offer our prayers to God.

Let us pray.

Remember, O Lord, in your love
the Church throughout the world . . .
those recently baptized and confirmed . . .
those who minister to others . . .

Silence

May your whole Church know your power and be a sign that Christ is risen.

Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love the world you have made . . .
those who seek a fair and proper use of the world's resources . . .
those who strive for justice and peace among the nations . . .

Silence

May the whole earth be transformed by mercy and rejoice in hope.

Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love those who suffer . . .
the victims of violence and injustice . . .
those who mourn . . .

We pray for Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family.

Silence

May all in need find comfort, strength and freedom in the living Christ.
Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love those who have died:
those who have confessed the faith
and those whose faith is known to you alone.

Silence

May all your children receive grace and light according to their needs and come at last to share with all the saints in life eternal.
Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Gracious God, we ask these prayers through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour.
Amen. *(Methodist Worship Book)*

Hymn StF 404 God's Spirit is in my heart (Go tell everyone)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VTQvYG-bl4>

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| <p>1 God's spirit is in my heart ;
he has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do,
what I have to do :
<i>He sent me to give the good news to the
poor
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no
more,
tell blind people that they can see,
and set the down-trodden free,
and go tell everyone
the news that the kingdom of God has
come ;
and go tell everyone
the news that God's kingdom has come.</i></p> | <p>3 Don't carry a load in your pack ;
you don't need two shirts on your back ;
God's workers can earn their own keep —
can earn their own keep :</p> <p>4 Don't worry what you have to say ;
don't worry, because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart —
will speak in your heart :</p> <p>v. 1 and refrain Alan T. Dale (1902–1979)
vv. 2-4 Hubert Richards (b. 1921)</p> |
| <p>2 Just as the Father sent me,
so I'm sending you out to be
my witness throughout the world —
the whole of the world :</p> | |

Closing sentences

We are witnesses to the love of God our Maker
We are witnesses to the peace that Jesus gives us
We are witnesses to the Holy Spirit in our loves
Surprised, challenged, healed and nourished, we go out in justice and joy.
(from 'Fire and Bread', compiled by Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications. 2006)

Blessing

The power of the Creator who brings life out of death, be with you.
The risen Christ be your constant companion,
The healing embrace of the Holy Spirit encircle you,
So that you always see resurrection about you.