

CIRCUIT SERVICE FOR EASTER SUNDAY 4 APRIL 2021-Rev. David Jenkins

"On this day, of all days"....

Call to Worship - It is Easter Sunday

(Responses with increasing volume each time!)

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

[Hymn 298 Singing the Faith \(193 Hymns and Psalms\) "Christ the Lord is risen today"](#)

1. Christ the Lord is risen today; Alleluia!
All creation joins to say: Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high; Alleluia!
Sing, you heavens; let earth, reply: Alleluia!
2. Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won; Alleluia!
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; Alleluia!
Christ has burst the gates of hell: Alleluia!
3. Lives again our glorious King; Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now your sting? Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save; Alleluia!
Where's your victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!
4. Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head; Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise; Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: Alleluia!
5. King of glory! Soul of bliss! Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
You to know, your power to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love: Alleluia!
(Charles Wesley)

Prayer

On this day, of all days, we praise you, living God.

You are from everlasting to everlasting.

All life, all time, the entire universe is your creation,

Sustained by the power of your purpose and the longing of your love.

On this day, of all days, we thank you for the gift of life.

Thank you for sleep to refresh us, rest to renew us, energy to galvanise us.

Each day of life we receive the fresh gift of our being.

Thank you for meaningful ways in which to respond to this gift.

On this day, of all days, we ask forgiveness for allowing what you have blessed us with to be confined in a tomb of our own making;
Forgive us for locking away our creativity, for stifling our imagination, for restricting our joy:
Forgive us for allowing the dead hands of discouragement and negativity to prevent the gifts, you have given so freely, from coming to life.
As you forgive and open the tomb, may those gifts live and flourish.
On this day, of all days, we are silenced by awe; and in that silence we adore our Risen Lord
..... (Silence)

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.**

All-Age Talk - "Breakthroughs"

We are particularly grateful to the people who have created the vaccines in use against the Covid 19 virus. They have managed to produce and test these life-saving vaccines much faster than anyone would ever have expected. It's been an important breakthrough. Even so, there are large numbers around the world who won't have vaccines because they don't believe they do any good.

Dr. Edward Jenner was the first person to create a vaccine, as long ago as 1796. At that time there was a horrible disease called smallpox, which particularly affected children, but people had told him that milkmaids, who were working with cows each day, caught a milder form of the disease called cowpox but they didn't catch smallpox. Dr. Jenner saw a link between the two diseases and used cowpox to make the first ever vaccine. He injected some young people, including his own son with cowpox and they all became immune (safe) from smallpox. There were plenty of people then who were horrified at what he was doing.

Life-giving happenings like these have often been made by people who see links between our health and things that happen in everyday life.

More than 100 years later another scientist, called Alexander Fleming, made another amazing discovery. He was experimenting on the mucus from his nose and one day noticed some mould was growing on one of his scientific dishes. He made the link between the mucus and the mould and created the world's first antibiotic which he called penicillin. Antibiotics have made life a lot safer for all of us.

Similarly Dr. Joseph Lister was concerned that 8 in 10 patients were dying days after they had been operated on. He had read the recent writings by Louis Pasteur about germs in the air, invisible microprobes that were the cause of infection. He began experimenting with chemicals to clean people's wounds. By using a piece of lint soaked in carbolic acid he was creating the world's first antiseptic which has saved huge numbers of lives since. He was connecting what he had been reading with his real life situations and the connections were making the difference.

Again plenty of people were sceptical, especially about germs you couldn't see. Even today there are some people who do not think corona virus is real-because, for one thing, you can't see it.

So what has all this to do with Easter Sunday?

On this day of all days there was an amazing, awesome, extraordinary breakthrough like no other. Jesus who had died was alive again; and the promise of new life here and after death became real for everyone.

There were, at the time, people who were sceptical about it all. Even Jesus' own followers were slow to believe (sometimes, even when he stood there with them!)

What they needed to do is what we all need to do-like Edward Jenner and Alexander Fleming and Joseph Lister and all the people who have been making life- saving breakthroughs- we need to make connections, links between the different things happening in our everyday lives. People who do that create new possibilities for all of us. People like that are building on the work of Jesus the healer which we read about in the Gospels. For isn't God involved in all this? Isn't Jesus the healer inspiring vaccination, antibiotic, antiseptic?

What if people in Edward Jenner's time had been told that one day people would fly in the air, or explore the sea bed or walk on the moon or communicate with people across the world by pressing a few buttons? Those things have come about because people have pushed the boundaries of what was thought to be possible. They have realised huge dreams and visions and made many connections. These almost miraculous happenings which were unthinkable at one time, take place when people are not content to stay where they are but to explore new possibilities.

Bill Gates, the inventor of Microsoft, was saying recently that the pandemic is a major challenge, but climate change is a much greater challenge. "What we need", he said, "is breakthroughs".

On this day of all days, when the biggest breakthrough of all has taken place, may we continue to dream dreams, to push the boundaries of what is possible, to make connections and to make breakthroughs happen.

[Hymn 311 Singing the Faith \(208 Hymns and Psalms\) "The day of resurrection"](#)

1. The day of resurrection!
Earth, tell it out abroad;
The Passover of gladness,
The Passover of God.
From death to life eternal,
From earth unto the sky,
Our Christ hath brought us over,
With hymns of victory.

2. Our hearts be pure from evil,
That we may see aright
The Lord in rays eternal
Of resurrection light;
And listening to His accents,
May hear, so calm and plain,
His own "All hail!" and, hearing,
May raise the victor strain.

3. Now let the heavens be joyful!
Let earth the song begin!
Let the round world keep triumph,
And all that is therein!
Let all things seen and unseen
Their notes in gladness blend,
For Christ the Lord is risen,
Our joy that has no end.

(St John of Damascus translated by John Mason Neale)

Reader - John 20:1-18

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[b] "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

[Hymn 305 Singing the Faith \(202 Hymns and Psalms\) "Low in the grave he lay"](#)

1. Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Saviour,
waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!
Up from the grave he arose;
with a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives forever, with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!

2. Vainly they watch his bed, Jesus my Saviour,
vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!
*Up from the grave he arose;
with a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives forever, with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*

3. Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus my Saviour;
he tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!
*Up from the grave he arose;
with a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives forever, with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*

(Robert Lowry)

Sermon "On this day, of all days"

On this day of all days

Because we often fail to make connections with everyday life and don't put 2 and 2 together to make 4; because we allow our pre-conceived ideas to prevent us seeing new truth, we may not realise the possibilities around us.

There are people who can help us move towards greater truth-scientists, medical researchers-but poets too.

Reflecting on life T S Eliot wrote "We had the experience but missed the meaning" - and how often might that have happened?

Recalling the time when Moses was encountered by God in a burning bush, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, "Earth's crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God; but only he who sees, takes off his shoes-the rest sit around and pluck blackberries!"
Only he who sees-that's part of the challenge of this day, of all days.

Other people who help us move towards greater truth are the Biblical writers and those who interpret their writing.

Biblical Scholar C H Dodd said of this reading in John's Gospel "There is something indefinably first- hand about it".

The three main people in the story are Peter, presumably John (the disciple Jesus loved) and, above all, Mary Magdalene.

Typical of Peter, when he arrives he goes straight in.

He sees the linen wrappings and the cloth neatly rolled up. What did he make of it? He was bemused and confused? He didn't make any particular connection? Not this time perhaps. Later in his life he will. Later in his life he sees a vision and connects it with a message-a request to come and share his faith with a Gentile man called Cornelius-and his making that connection brought all of us who are not Jewish into the Christian community. His making a connection on that occasion would lead to a very major breakthrough. But not today? He's been through such grief and guilt that it blocks his seeing and dulls his thinking?

What about John? John ran and reached the tomb first. He looked in but didn't go in. John, however, did make some kind of connection. "He saw and believed". Quite what he believed we're not sure as the narrative goes on to say "as yet they did not understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead". Does that phrase "he saw and believed" mean that he was beginning to open his mind to new possibilities? Does it mean that some kind of understanding may often need to precede a moment of realisation?

The Medical Researchers, Scientists and Inventors we heard about earlier were already working on solving a problem, meeting a challenge, so they would be more open to seeing, to being aware, to making these connections and to take on board their possibilities? You often hear the phrase "Seeing is believing" -unless I see the germs in the air, unless I see this virus, unless I see the mark of the nails on his hands, I will not believe". But what if we turn the phrase on its head and say "Believing is seeing"?

How we perceive things affects how we approach them. A child goes to a farm. He approaches a sheep. One parent says "Lovely cuddly sheep". The other says "Dirty, messy sheep". Whether or not he strokes the sheep will depend on which of those perceptions he holds onto.

John doesn't yet know what to make of what he is seeing, but his willingness to see and believe creates an openness to receive revelation, to encounter new truth. It is open and responsive minds and hearts that will have the experience and hopefully not miss the meaning.

And then there's Mary.

What a great range of surging emotions she was to experience that day!

She set out to offer the one thing she could to the person she loved. It was the least and the last thing she could do for him now-to anoint his dead body with spices.

Setting out when it was early and still dark may suggest she hadn't slept much after the traumatic events of the shock of Friday.

She was keen to get to the tomb as soon as it was legally permissible after the enforced lockdown of the Sabbath Day. (Does enforced lockdown ring any bells?)

She saw what had happened -"she saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb"-so she seeks for a logical and sensible explanation-"they have taken the body of the Lord out of the tomb". By "they" she presumably meant the authorities-Jewish or Roman-the people whose power and position has been asserted and underlined by Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. She may have thought that "they" had been involved in some further dastardly vandalism, some further act of disrespect and abuse towards the body of Jesus; some further falsification of truth and decency and goodness.

For Mary the whole scenario and the questions of the angels and the man she thought to be the gardener might have seemed annoyingly frustrating. All these questions seemed to her to be missing the point. Why didn't anyone help instead of asking questions?

We recognise in Mary's reactions the bewildering frustrations we've felt when there has been something of tremendous personal importance to do and we've set out deliberately as first priority to do it and nothing has worked out. Everything has gone wrong. A bad situation has got even worse. What can be more maddeningly disheartening than setting out to anoint the body of the person you have loved most in life and then to find that the body isn't even there?

And then one word is said which utterly changed the day -"Mary". It not only changed the day; that one word changed history.

She is addressed by name-the intimacy and familiarity of her own name. No "Woman" this time. No formal address "Miss Smith", but "Mary"-the person known, and known at depth.

In her amazement she doesn't call him by his first name, but by the respectful title with which she and others would have addressed him -"Rabbouni", Rabbi, Teacher, Conveyor of Spiritual Truth.

All of her desire was to hold onto him, but, as in these Lockdown day, that natural, instinctual physical contact is deemed not to be helpful. We can only speculate what "Do not hold onto me because I have not yet ascended to the Father" signifies in regard to his body. His body is recognisably the same, yet different. It seems to be less limited in that he can turn up anywhere-even when doors are locked. His body appears to be in some kind of transitional state? Whatever the reasons they don't embrace.

But Jesus gives her a message she gladly conveys to all his brothers that speaks of " my Father and your Father, my God and your God".

Whatever doubts about God which had crept in since Jesus' crucifixion on Friday could be dispelled now. God's purposes have been fulfilled (finished/completed).

For Peter, John and Mary the truth and wonder was always beyond what they could see. Peter could, apparently, only see the evidence of his own eyes, but couldn't necessarily see what lay beyond that.

John could see and believe-but only up to the furthest point of his understanding. The implications of this day would go far beyond the limits of his initial horizons.

And that's how it always is. The truth, the reality, the actuality of God's living presence amongst us always vastly transcends any point of understanding we have reached-even when we have seen and believed. Our belief is an important step towards such realisation-but still only a step. The fullness of what God is will always be many steps in front of us.

And what of this day for Mary? She had a job to do and things so worked out that she couldn't do it, and, indeed, there was no need to do it. There was no conspiracy. There was no act of further vandalism nor abuse. The authorities had not taken charge nor dictated events. Here is something far greater than any human achievement, any government initiative. For once everything does not depend on those who are in charge. This is far beyond any level of human responsibility or competence. This is an act of God, unlike any other, but full of promise and significance -an utterly transformed future for humanity.

On this day, of all days, let the immense joy of God within and among us pervade our lives and extend our understanding. May it affect how we see life deep down. May it affect the quality of our relationships. May the openness of mind and heart towards new possibilities enable us to make connections which will lead us and others forwards. May the transformation of Easter Day become the energy which inspires us towards the transformation of the Earth and its peoples.

Prayers - In the silence let us make our own response to what we have heard

We pray for those around the world, in these years of pandemic, who live with death -people working in Intensive Care Units and in medical care; people working in Residential Homes for the Elderly; for those offering Funeral services; for those who are seriously ill; for all who have suffered bereavement in recent times...

We pray for those around the world, who live alongside emerging life-new parents; midwives; veterinary surgeons; farmers; teachers; child minders.....

We pray for those around the world who long for freedom-human rights activists, especially those who are imprisoned; people whose lives are restricted by poverty, disability, oppressive regimes.....

We pray for the Christian Church throughout the world, celebrating on this day..for Christians in Sri Lanka who remember terrorist attacks two years ago..for those whose words will be listened to and reflected upon by large numbers of people; for us, sharing with each other, supporting one another.....

May we work with you in bringing consolation where there is death; gratitude where there is birth; courage where there is hardship; joy in the celebration of faith -on this day of all days, through our Risen Lord Jesus, Amen.

[Hymn 313 Singing the Faith \(212 Hymns and Psalms\) "Thine be the glory"](#)

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.

Refrain:

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.*

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.

Refrain:

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.*

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.

Refrain:

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.*

(Edmond Budry translated by Richard Birch Hoyle)

Benediction -

On this day, of all days, we offer praise;
On this day, of all days, we receive your joy;
On this day, of all days, we live with hope;
May the blessing of the Father who created life and raised Jesus from death;
Of the Son, who shared our life that we might share his;
And of the life-giving Spirit be ours deep within
Not only on this day, but for all the days of our life and beyond, and beyond and beyond
Amen