

The United Reformed Churches in Harpenden, Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampsted

Sunday 12th April 2020

Easter Day

Happy Easter!!

We have made it through Lent and Covid 19 and Holy Week to this special day and how good it is to share together. We will have missed our Easter breakfast but perhaps sat down and enjoyed what we would normally share together to make it particularly special even though we are apart.

It is now our opportunity to worship God in each others company wherever we are, and to reflect with awe and wonder on the wonder of this day.

We come to worship God...

The long wait is over

Pause

The tomb is empty

Pause

The grave clothes folded

Pause

The alleluias are alive, released, to be said and sung

Jesus is risen

Happy Easter my friends

Jesus is risen

Alleluia He is risen indeed!

Hymn Christ the Lord is risen today

1 Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye 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 thy sting? Alleluia!
Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's your victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Prayer

How wonderful it is to say again – Living God
Living God we come to you



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!

On this strangest of Easter mornings
With Alleluias not resounding in our churches but said in our hearts or shyly spoken
Yet never have those Alleluias been so sincerely meant.
Never have we needed to hear so clearly your words of life and hope,
Your promise of resurrection and new life for all.
Wherever we are as we share this Easter worship may the life you redeemed from death
Be alive in us that in our living and being we proclaim a life that never dies
And is so full of Alleluias, of love of justice and the making of peace it can never die.
Even today and in the weeks of physical separation that lie ahead of us
May we find a myriad of ways to proclaim you are alive, struggling with us, making all things new.
May we be ready to share the good news with whoever we speak to.
As we celebrate today call us to new life again
And show us the possibilities even today
Of life in all its fulness. In Jesus name Amen.

The Lords Prayer

Gospel Reading John 20 (NLT)

The Resurrection

20 Early on Sunday morning,^[a] while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. ² She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

³ Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. ⁴ They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. ⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— ⁹ for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then they went home.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. ¹² She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her.

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

¹⁴ She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. ¹⁵ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?”

She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

¹⁶ “Mary!” Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).

¹⁷ “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

He is not here. The stone has been rolled.

He is not here. The tomb, it lies empty.

He is not here. The women have told us.

He is not here. Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Hymn 248 This joyful Eastertide

This joyful Eastertide,
Away with sin and sorrow!
My Love, the Crucified,
Hath 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.

Had Christ, that once...

Death's flood hath lost his chill,
Since Jesus cross'd the river
Lover of souls, from ill
My passing soul deliver. *Had
Christ, that once ...*

Reflecting on this awesome day

In the tension and anxiety of these last weeks there probably was – especially to begin with an emphasis on our bodily condition...

Is that a temperature? Was that just a tickle in my throat or something worse? Those fleeting fears and thoughts that go through our minds unasked, the mental checking out of our vital signs.

The first question that came to mind was to wonder what were the vital signs of resurrection?

The disciples had heard what would happen to him from Jesus himself but they had missed it, not taken it in because they couldn't imagine how what Hans Urs von Balthasar called the plot twist God crafted for a story headed for disaster could possibly come about.

I wonder what resurrection means to you?

To me it is Gods affirmation that all Jesus told us is true.

On the cross Jesus truly became the Christ suffering with all humanity, as he suffers with us still but for God to be God of love and justice, mercy and forgiveness, violence and sin, death and destruction could not be the end of the story.

So what were the vital signs of resurrection?

The first sign was that he was breathing. Breath is essential to life

Jesus spoke Mary, and later when he appeared to the disciples he breathed on them· real breath – the kind of breath that would steam up a glass, breathing the Holy Spirit into his disciples to help them adapt to their new circumstances of life without Jesus constant presence
– breath is life.

A living breathing body needs to be able to take nourishment. Jesus ate with the disciples; on one occasion it was he who cooked the breakfast on the shore. He fed them in other ways too - along the road on the way to Emmaus he opened the scriptures to make sure they understood.

He provided for them to nourish each other.

The ability to eat is a vital sign for Jesus and as the Body of Christ he invites us to remember him every time we eat together, around his table at communion, and to feed one another as we dig into Gods living word.

There is no doubt from the eye witness accounts that Jesus was alive

Not resuscitated, but resurrected, given a new body to replace the one that had died.

Whatever resurrection physically means – is part of the mystery of who God is. That it is possible

is a matter of faith and belief in the witness of those who saw him, and heard his voice, ate his breakfast and felt his breath warm upon their face.

By faith we are witnesses to the resurrection too.

I have seen this speculation written many times over the last few weeks that mother natures vital signs had been ignored; that she had sent floods and fires as a warning to us that she was in trouble, polluted, drained of her lifeblood. We ignored her at our peril, and she took matters into her own hands to see us locked down to allow her to breathe. Now we see new birth; clear waters around Venice with dolphins swimming in the canals; a huge drop in pollution as factories are stilled, planes are grounded, and cars reduced to a trickle instead of a stream.

Some people say that life will not go back to how it was as people have found they can work from home and manage without holidays abroad.

It has also bought us to our knees and out onto our streets with our neighbours to clap the NHS staff and every keyworker who is putting themselves at risk to keep us going.

For us to be true Easter people vital signs of new life need to be seen in our churches and in our own lives too. We need the Holy Spirit bringing life and help and hope, we need to be nourished and to offer nourishment to others, physical feeding but spiritual nurture too

We need to move – to be the body of Christ wherever we find ourselves and the church has needed and continues to need to adapt to changing circumstances.

Jesus proved at Easter that it is in giving that we receive and in dying that we gain eternal life.

Quite literally Jesus said to Mary something along the lines of

- More can be mended than you think.

That's what we all want to hear just now, and Jesus relies on us today to do the telling and be part of the mending, mending ourselves as we go.

As we find new ways to mend we might think of it as sharing our Easter alleluias. Alleluias have been silent throughout Lent but now is the time to let them fly. Perhaps finding new ways to show love and care for those around us is the best way we have of articulating the mystery of faith and our willingness to be complicit in passing it on.

What ingenious ways will you find to share your alleluias from this day forward?

The message is yours to share

Alleluia

Christ is risen

Alleluia he is risen indeed.

Prayer

Risen Lord, today we are blessed with witnessing your vital signs your message of hope found in the story of your resurrection.

Today the alleluias continue to echo in our ears and our minds, but as we sit and shout 'Alleluia' with smiles and eggs and daffodils we remember the times when we have not joined in but turned our faces away refusing to forgive, failing to speak out in the face of injustice, not loving others or treating others as we would want ourselves.

Forgiving Lord, wipe our slates clean. Let us hear you say -It is finished.

As we sit and shout 'Alleluia' with smiles and eggs and daffodils we bring before you those who are still calling out for you to come to them in their distress. Those around the world who are enduring the effects of COVID 19: those who are ill, those who have lost loved ones, people struggling to provide for their families, not knowing which way to turn. We pray for everyone on the frontline in any capacity, especially those in the NHS face to face with the effects of this virus each day.

Be with our Prime Minister and bring healing to him and all who need it Lord, and give us the means to stamp out this virus completely

as you always work for the good of those who love you.

We know that love conquers all.

Not even death could hold you in its grasp. May love conquer once more...

Charge us, inspire us and move us to bring love to this world,

to bring hope to this world, to reveal you, the Risen Christ,

in this world now and always. Amen.

Offering

God, by our smallest actions, we become part of a bigger world.

The smallest giving can be an expression of the good spirit of generosity and caring.

Help us to carry through the doorway of each new day this good spirit of generosity and caring.

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY: The Lords Supper

Such an event as sharing bread and wine, was common in the time of Jesus. Folk gathered for the sacred moment of the meal when bread was broken and the cup blessed.

It reminded them of their story, the way they believed their God had led them, the hope that was given to them, and the blessing they received.

We are told in our tradition: Jesus took the bread and wine and gave that additional blessing of faith for the future day.

The church through the generations has embraced this event as a central sacrament of the Faith. It was to be the substantial symbol of a life-enhancing presence, giving the courage to bring a different spirit to the world.

Jesus is risen from the dead And says I am here, can you see me?

Not in crown of thorns or cross or nails but present in every life where I have been given a home.

So let us greet Jesus in each other as we say Peace be with you. **Peace be with you.**

**Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy.
Bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.**

***Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!***

**Christ is able to make us one.
At the table he sets the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving

**Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share.
God (Immanuel) everywhere!**

Thank you for this table loving God that sets before us the symbols of life.
We give you thanks God for our life and the courage to live it.

This sacrament has been given by Jesus to enhance and enrich our lives.
We will receive it with thanksgiving and faith.

Silence

We thank you Lord for your life, your dedication, your obedience, your sacrifice that led you all the way to the cross and through death to the glory of resurrection.

How easily that rolls of the tongue, how rocky a path it was for you to follow. May the deep truth of the love that blazed from the cross

And blazes brighter still change our way of being in the world.

May your deep love for us renew our lives and enable us to live in gratitude and generosity.

(Pause)

As we stand on Holy ground breathe new life into us, into our world and into this bread and wine that it may feed us body, mind and spirit with all we need to commune with you. **Amen**

On the night that Jesus was betrayed he took bread – as he always did

He blessed it, and broke it and he gave it to the disciples saying

This is my body - broken for you.

Eat of it all of you for the remembering of me.

After supper he took the cup, one of the four cups of blessing, and again he changed the words, saying this is the cup of the new covenant, the new relationship between you and my Father, it is for the forgiveness of sins, it is sealed by my blood.

Bread is broken

The bread is broken for us to take. **We will receive it in faith.**

The wine is here for us to take. **We will receive it in faith.**

Silence

Concluding prayer

Thank You for touching us again with Your life through bread and wine; For joining our lives with Yours through Jesus; And for renewing resurrection in our hearts through your Holy Spirit.

Filled with life, we now offer ourselves to be life-bringers in the world. Touched by resurrection we pledge to resist death wherever we find it. Filled with hope we embrace the promise of eternity, and the call to make it known at every opportunity. Amen

Final thoughts

When we stand in the spotlight of our faith Jesus calls us to be that kind of community- where serving takes us out of our comfort zone and means standing up for what we believe in, protecting the weak and vulnerable,

sitting alongside those who are broken hearted, working for justice and for peace and looking for the smallest breakthrough in the lives of those who are locked in not just by our current circumstances but by attitude or choice.

This is the church Christ needs today as in every age.

It is for those who are not part of its membership, it is costly, challenging risky. It brings us to the foot of the cross where Christ is crucified today and every day with those who suffer where we stand to look to resurrection and where resurrection allows us to stand and not despair.

All this is possible because one Sunday morning the greatest barrier of all time was broken down for us and for every person we encounter on the way. Far more can be mended than your think!

Hymn

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
His cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
His love in death shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
he comes to claim the here and now,
and conquer every place and time.

In every insult, rift and war,
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
he suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, though ever crucified.

**God the Father, by whose glory
Christ was raised from the dead,
strengthen us all to walk with him in his risen life;
Christ our brother
Send us by whatever means possible from the safety of our homes
by the power of the Spirit
to bring hope, love and laughter
and in all things to live and work for your glory. Amen.**

I hope you have a very Happy Easter and keep your eyes open for the signs of new life around you.

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.

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.

