



## PERSONAL SERVICE – EASTER SUNDAY

The Lord is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Alleluia!

**Hymn** STF 298, H&P 193, MP76 “Christ the Lord is risen today”

### **Prayer**

God, our heavenly Father, today we celebrate the amazing truth that Jesus is alive. He lives with you forever, beyond the limitations of human life, for now he is Lord of all space and Lord of all time. He lives with us forever, bringing your life into our life, Lord of here and now.

Father, as we welcome the good news of his life with you, his unlimited power and love, may we know the effects of his life with us. May we know his compassion and patience, the love that binds us together, the courage to forgive and to be forgiven.

Loving God, forgive us our slowness in believing and our difficulties in understanding the mystery of Easter. We pray that you will accept our faith and help us when that faith falls short. Help us to grasp that you are permanently risen so that we may worship you as you are.

### **Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Paul’s gospel starts from Jesus and his appearances to the first disciples. Paul emphasises the sheer fact of the resurrection. He points out that the evidence is overwhelming. Christ died and was buried. At the resurrection he was raised to life once more and appeared on several occasions to many people. Paul himself was living proof of the work of the risen Christ having been turned from persecutor into preacher. Here readers are asked if they take seriously the testimony of those who saw the risen Jesus.

**Hymn** STF 306, H&P 204 “Now the green blade rises”

### **Reading: Mark 16:1-8**

This is probably the earliest account we have of the visit of the women to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday. Here we see the themes of surprise, unexpectedness and fear. The first shock was that the great stone was already rolled away. The women were completely overcome by the words the youth in white said to them. In the earliest manuscripts the gospel ended at this point without any resurrection appearances. It ends with the women afraid and unable to tell anyone what they had found. Yet the truth of the risen Jesus had soon spread far and wide.

## Sermon

A Methodist minister had just bought a brand new bright blue car. On his first drive in it he came to a junction and had to stop while a circus passed by. There was a long procession of clowns and animals, and at the end were six elephants walking in line. As they passed the car one of the elephants left the line, turned left, reversed and sat on the bonnet of the car, denting it in the process. The circus owner was very apologetic. He apologised profusely for what the elephant had done. He promised that he would pay for the car to be repaired but he had to dash off to catch up with the procession.

The minister sat in his car still somewhat dazed by the experience. Shortly afterwards a blue uniform appeared at his window. The policeman asked him what the problem was. The minister replied, being truthful, that an elephant had just sat on his bonnet. The policeman looked quite annoyed and said he didn't expect a man of the cloth to take the mickey. When he got the same reply a second time he asked the minister to accompany him to the station. The police then rang the circus who confirmed it was quite true. The elephants had coloured stools to sit on, one of which was bright blue. The elephant had mistaken the car for its stool. Just because something seems unbelievable doesn't mean it didn't happen.

The resurrection is an amazing truth. It seems so incredible that it is hard to believe. How can we believe it?

We can believe it because of the transformation it brought about. The women didn't go to the tomb in hope and expectation. They went to the tomb in fear and despair. All their hopes and dreams had been shattered, Jesus had been executed. When they found that the tomb was empty, they didn't immediately think that Jesus was alive again. They assumed that the body had been stolen, that was much more logical, that was a much more likely explanation. Even when they saw this young man dressed in white, even when they heard what he said, they still didn't believe Jesus was alive. They were confused, they were terrified, they ran off and we're told they didn't tell anyone about it at first.

Only something amazing could have transformed those women and the first disciples, who were just as confused and just as frightened. It was only meeting the risen Jesus that could have caused such a complete change. They were changed from frightened and despairing people into dynamic and fearless leaders and preachers. They couldn't have done that themselves, only the resurrection really makes sense and explains how they could be so completely transformed.

We can believe it also because it has stood the test of time. Time can be a great tester. In 1900 Octavio Guillen met the girl who would one day be his wife. Two years later he announced his engagement to Adriana Martinez and everyone said they would make a lovely couple. They still made a lovely couple when they married in Mexico City in 1969. They were both 82 and had been engaged for 67 years. Faith in the resurrection has stood the test of time.

The disciples held on to their faith even when they were persecuted. They were even prepared to die for their faith as many of them did. They would never have been willing to die for their faith if they'd made it up. If they knew the resurrection wasn't true, if they knew they'd invented it all, they would never have died for it. People may occasionally die for the truth, but they won't die for a fairy story.

Christians have faced great danger for their faith and they still do. In 1973 Idi Amin was executing people in Uganda for preaching the Christian faith. On Easter Day in 1973 Pastor Sempangi bravely and openly preached at the local football stadium to several thousand people. After the service five members of the secret police followed him back to his church. They closed the door behind them and pointed their guns at Sempangi's head. The captain said they would execute him for disobeying Amin's orders. The Easter faith the pastor had just preached gave him courage and he said he would pray for them that they might see the error of their ways. After a while they lowered their guns and asked him to pray for them. Those five officers were converted through his bravery and went on to protect him from then on.

The Christian faith has stood the test of time, it has been attacked many times but it has survived. The church has struggled in this country for some years now, but the picture is very different elsewhere. Worldwide the church is still growing. There are many more Christians in the world today than at any time in history. The world population is growing, but the church is growing faster, the proportion of people who are Christians now is greater than ever before.

We believe in the resurrection because of the evidence, but most of all we believe it because we have experienced the truth of Easter. We have met with the risen Jesus ourselves. What we are celebrating today isn't just history. It isn't that we have just read about Jesus, it isn't that we've been told about him, we can meet him ourselves.

Jesus is alive today and we can meet him today. The most convincing evidence for the resurrection is not what we can read, it is not what others tell

us. The most convincing evidence is what we have experienced ourselves and what we know to be true.

**Hymn** STF 314, H&P 213 “This joyful Eastertide”

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the assurance that Jesus has been raised from death and now reigns with you. We pray for our world in the light of that amazing truth.

We pray for those who have compromised with evil and find themselves on a downward path into darkness.

We pray for those who have lost their sense of wonder and expect nothing new.

We pray for those who have achieved the security they sought but find themselves disappointed with the life they now have.

Help them all to understand that as you raised Jesus from the dead you can enable us all to live the new life that the risen Jesus offers us.

**Hymn** STF 313, H&P 212, MP 689 “Thine be the glory”

Go in hope, the risen Lord goes before you.

Go in peace, the risen Lord goes with you.

Go in love, the risen lord lives within you.