



Worship for 18th April 2021 Third Sunday of Easter Year B

Call to worship:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Suggested hymn: *The day of resurrection* – StF 311, H&P 208

Prayer (by Moira Laidlaw):

Lord Jesus Christ, the light of your love shines on,
illuminating the places where you are present.

As the bewildered disciples pondered the stories of your appearance,
you penetrated the darkness of their fear and doubt with your word of peace.

You showed them the appalling marks of evil pierced on your hands and feet.

You opened their minds to understand

why you had to die to defeat such evil and death.

Increase our understanding, we pray,

and open our minds and hearts to receive you, Lord.

Speak your word of peace to us

and let your love shine on any dark areas in our lives.

May this worship which we offer in your name

be a worthy response to your love and your sacrifice for us. **Amen.**

Readings:

Acts 3:12-19

Gospel: Luke 24:36b-48

Address:

What? Not another sermon about the first Easter Day?

Of course, because, though this is the 3rd Sunday of Easter, in our Gospel reading it is still Easter day, still the evening of the day of resurrection. Of course, because, as my Roman Catholic colleague reminded his congregation as he wished them happy Easter: “Don’t forget to celebrate it for 50 days”! Of course, because for us every Sunday is a celebration of Easter Day.

The pair who encountered the Jesus as an apparent stranger on the road to Emmaus and recognised him only in the breaking of the bread, have rushed back to the city to tell their friends that Jesus is risen. They discover, as their friends reply: ‘He is risen indeed’ that Jesus has also appeared to Simon

Peter. Then, as they are all gathered in their joy, excitement and perplexity, Jesus appears again amongst them speaking his word of peace.

They are perplexed and we are perplexed as we read. How can it be? Appearing and disappearing at will, a ghost perhaps? No ghost, Jesus is solid and real – look how he eats. It is really him – and yet they had not recognised him on the road. He is still with them, it is really him, and yet...

It was mind-boggling to them, mind-blowing. It can be mind-boggling and mind-blowing to us too if we make the mistake of bringing only our minds to the encounter. Christ is risen – it is the challenge of our faith and the gospel which is good news to us. The Creator God makes all things new, and the resurrection of Jesus is his first act of new creation. As we approach the truth of Easter let us not get hung up on the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ but let us leave these to God. Creation – old and new – is God’s area of expertise after all! Rather, let us get hung up on what it means for us and for our lives of discipleship.

“Then he 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.”

As Jesus opens the scriptures to them, they see how the death and resurrection were spoken of there; and they see how what is spoken of there becomes clearer in the light of that death and resurrection. The only proof of the resurrection will be the bringing to fruition of God’s purposes as embodied in scripture and in the life, death and resurrection they have been witness to. What must come to fruition is that the whole world knows repentance and forgiveness of sins, that the whole world experiences the full embrace of God’s saving and healing love. And this will come to fruition through them – this is the task Jesus leaves his followers then and now!

We do not have to look far afield or for too long to see the world as we humans have created it: full of broken relationships and conflict, power struggles and hatred, inhumanity and injustice, greed, lying and cheating (even at the highest levels of society). This is the world to which repentance and forgiveness of sins needs to be proclaimed and the task of proclamation, whether we like it or not, is ours. *Sometimes* we will use words.

The Risen Jesus is Lord and the Kingdom of God comes only when all the world knows the power of forgiveness and healing. Only the global application of something like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that Desmond Tutu inaugurated in South Africa will do. And lest we think the task too

daunting we hear the same words that Jesus spoke to the first disciples: You are witnesses of these things. We have the promised Spirit's power to play our part, as individuals and as a church, in bringing that world of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation into being. Resurrection and mission belong together too, Jesus commands. And living out the mission is the only true way to celebrate Easter. Jesus taught God's Way based on the revelation of scripture and the early church set us the example of how to live that Way. It is in our living of the Way of Jesus that God may transform the world.

We affirm or deny the resurrection of Jesus not by what we believe about what happened to the body of Jesus and how but by the way in which we live out its implications. In his Easter sermon, a friend of mine, quoted the theologian Peter Rollins and, as I read, I felt the powerful challenge of the words:

"I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor; I deny the resurrection of Christ when I close my ears to the cries of the downtrodden and lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system. However, there are moments when I affirm that resurrection, few and far between as they are. I affirm it when I stand up for those who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have had their tongues torn out, when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed."

And I will be the person who does such things as I open myself to be a channel of Christ's love. This is the challenge of resurrection. However else we understand what happened that first Easter day, it was without question God's resounding 'yes' to the way of radical, self-sacrificial love we encounter in the life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord and to which we are called.

Amen. Alleluia!

Prayer of Response (by John van de Laar)

How do we find the faith to believe the story of Easter, Jesus?

How do we grasp its truth?

We can only accept it; refusing to reduce it to scientific debate or historical literalism,

kneeling with humility and awe

beside the blood-stained cross

and the empty grave;

For then, we are your witnesses.

How do we understand the mystery of your death and life, Jesus?
How do we explain it?
We can only live it; allowing it to permeate every grain
of this sand that forms us,
every thought, every priority, every act and every interaction,
For then we are your witnesses,
and you deserve nothing less from us.
Amen.

Intercession (by Michael Saward)

Eternal God, to whom all may come through your Son,
lay your healing hand upon all those who are sick.
Make your loving presence known to those who are lonely.
Give your strengthening power to those who are weak.
May those who lack be filled,
those who mourn be comforted,
those who worry be calmed
and those who seek forgiveness find it in Jesus Christ;
through whom we pray. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father...

Suggested hymn: *Christ is alive! Let Christians sing* StF 297, H&P 190

Blessing:

Go to the world again in confidence;
play your part in God's creation
and never lose heart.
Put your faith in the risen Christ,
who will match his stride to yours
until your journey's end.
And the blessing of the Eternal God,
Creator, Saviour and Holy Spirit
be with us all. **Amen.**