

Complete order of service for Easter Sunday morning April 4th 2021

Call to Worship Oh what a morning

Arnold family

Day breaks, darkness flees,

Death has been defeated.

He is not here, he has risen!

Christ is risen, He's alive, Alleluia!

Welcome to our service on this Easter Sunday morning. My thanks to go Rev Val Reid who will be sharing in this service with me - this is Val's last service before her three month sabbatical. We wish you God's blessings in this time of refreshment and renewal, Val. Also my thanks goes to the Arnold family who led our call to worship, to Tom who will be leading the rest of our music, to Matt who will be bringing our Bible reading to us and not forgetting John who is doing all the essential technical things behind the scenes.

Let us sing our praises to God on this Easter morning.

See what a morning STF 309

See what a morning, gloriously bright

with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;

folded the grave-clothes, tomb filled with light,

as the angels announce Christ is risen!

See God's salvation plan,

wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,

fulfilled in Christ, the Man,

for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping, 'Where is he laid?'

as in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;

hears a voice speaking, calling her name;

it's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!

The voice that spans the years,

speaking life, stirring hope , bringing peace to us ,
will sound till he appears,
for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty;
honour and blessing, glory and praise
to the King crowned with power and authority!
And we are raised with him,
death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered;
and we shall reign with him,
For he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

So let us pray:

All-loving and all-powerful God,
we thank you for this day and all it means-
the assurance it brings that your love is stronger
than anything else in heaven or earth-
stronger than evil, than all human powers
than sorrow and suffering, than death itself.
Accept our praise and thanks this day.
We thank you that in our world of so much pain and sorrow
you have shown that hope and faith is not in vain.
Your purpose is always at work,
giving meaning to our seeking and striving after good.
Accept our praise and thanks this day.
All – loving and all- powerful God
Accept our praise for all you have done in Christ –

a mystery before which we stand in awe,
a wonder before which we bow down in praise,
a truth in which we live and move and have our being.

Accept our praise and thanks this day,

Accept our praise and thanks for everything in the name of the living and risen Christ!

Amen

[Nick Fawcett]

But loving and forgiving God we know that so often we fall short of living out your Easter message of hope and love. We acknowledge that in past year, there have been events, personal, national and international which have shaken us, which have left our spirits low.

God of the new day, turn our sorrow into joy, our mourning into dancing;

take our heavy burdens from us ;

free us from all that holds us back and crushes our spirit.

The darkness of Good Friday has lifted and Easter resounds with forgiveness.

In the loving name of the risen Christ, we know we are forgiven.

Amen

Matt will shortly bring us our Gospel reading. In the three year cycle of the lectionary, the set reading for this Easter Sunday is from Mark's gospel. As in the narratives of the birth stories of Jesus, the Easter narrative in the four gospels differ from each other and none more so than in Mark's gospel. It ends abruptly [so much so that many scholars thought that the end of that gospel had been lost and so an additional ending was written which can be found in bibles]. So much so that even the Roots magazine, which is a resource for preachers, chooses the alternative set reading from John's gospel today. Mark's gospel ends with a reaction of terror and silence. There is no appearance of Jesus. And yet this account feels right for where we are today as we slowly emerge from this year of lockdowns but still unsure of the future. We will reflect on this shortly.

Mark 16: 1-8a

Reflection – Allowing God to break through

I wonder if you have ever read a book with an ending that wasn't how you thought it would be. Maybe it doesn't feel like the end because there are so many unknown things. I remember reading a book which ended with a car crash and yet I was not sure whether the characters, I had got to know whilst reading the book, were alright. Were they injured or even killed or had they escaped harm? I wanted to know what happened next [of course

this may have been a ploy to make you buy the next book in the series]. I wanted to know the answers. I can remember feeling not just surprised but shocked.

It is rather like this as we hear the Easter story as it is recorded by Mark, no appearances by Jesus, no reassurance of His presence. After the women came to the tomb, find it empty and meet the mysterious stranger with his shattering news, Mark simply wrote, 'So they went out and ran from the tomb distressed and terrified. They said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.' Surely today is meant to be a day of joy and gladness and here is Mark giving us a picture of distress and fear. No wonder we prefer John's account where Mary meets Jesus and then hurries back to the disciples with the good news 'He is risen.' That is a message full of hope and celebration to enjoy. What we have to remember is that when the early church was read Mark's account with its abrupt ending, they would have been aware that this was not the end of the story; it was really the beginning of something new and wonderful. For with the resurrection, the pattern of life and death was broken forever. The past as it had been was gone. Reading a sermon, preached by John Harvey, a member of the Iona community and based on this reading, he says 'God is on the loose, God is out of the box!'

What does that mean for us? It means that the living God in Christ is with us now as He was in our past and will be in our future. We have a tendency, [I know I do] and none more so than at the present time, to look back at how things used to be [pre- lockdown]. Those times when we had the freedom to go where we wanted, to enjoy holidays all round the globe, to mix easily with family and friends enjoying a meal or a coffee in our own homes, to have face to face conversation with our GP, to worship together in the same building and sing out loud our praises to God. All things that we took for granted fifteen months ago. We are also at this time wondering when – when will we be able to go on holiday, visit our parents, children and grandchildren, when will we be able to go out without a mask or be socially distanced, when will the daily news bulletins not be taken up with COVID matters and when will we be able to meet to worship as a Christchurch family. Even now we seem to be in a state of limbo and waiting, afraid even for what might be to come. For we know it will not and cannot be the same as the past. And so in many ways we are in the same state as the women and the disciples after the resurrection, waiting, hoping, trusting in God but also acknowledging that hopefully something new, something more wonderful and exciting than we can imagine at this time will lie ahead in God's resurrection power.

Edmund Banyard, a former moderator of URC, wrote these words in one of his wonderful meditations in his book entitled 'Reaching for the Infinite' [a book I would thoroughly recommend]. 'What we celebrate at Easter is not only the rhythms of nature, new life springing up after winter sleep. We are celebrating upheaval and unpredictability. God acts in such a way that no one knows what may happen next. We are celebrating not reform but revolution and it isn't finished yet'. These words are a far cry from pictures of flowers and chickens which we see depicted on Easter cards. These words embrace the Cross where Jesus died for us all, the miracle of the stone rolled away and Jesus' resurrection and onto Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. These are the events, which the early followers of Jesus lived through, challenging, demanding not knowing often what was to come next.

Yet God was with them. Through the appearances of Jesus to those early disciples, he taught them [and us] that He is alive. He is not bound to one place and time. His presence can strengthen, comfort and bring us His peace. And through the power of His Spirit we, as individuals and as a church, can have the power to move in the direction He wants us to. We may feel like a small seed pushing its way tentatively through the ground but remember how that plant grows and blossoms into something wonderful, something fruitful. 'Don't be alarmed, don't be afraid', the young man, the angel, said to the women. Christ says the same to us. In His hands, we are secure and we can look to the future with anticipation and hope. So let us allow God to break through into our lives once again.

Become our resurrection

Living God save us

from confining your activity

to the distant past and the far off future.

Give us the courage to expect your action

in the world as it is

as you bring new life to birth before our eyes.

Give us the vigilance

to watch for the movement of your spirit

in the tumult of nations and the voices of nature

in cultures which are strange to us and in religious traditions

we find hard to understand.

Give us the vision

to sense your hand upon our future as we come to terms

with changing patterns of work and leisure,

as we discover new truths about the universe,

and as we explore the beginning and end of human existence.

Living God become for us

the Resurrection each day as we seek to live

gloriously and responsibly by your love.

David Jenkins [1997]

STF 306 Now the green blade rises

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:

When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,
then your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
John Macleod Campbell Crum

Prayers Remembering God's people

The Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Step out into the day into resurrection light.

Feel the joy that new life brings, accept the peace that it offers

And share the love that it gives.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this Eastertide and forever more. Amen

STF 313 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
*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:

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:
Edmond Budry