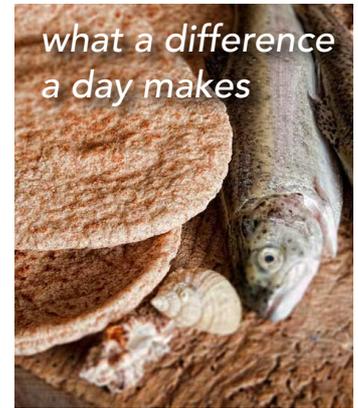


Worship • 18th April 2021

Christchurch, Hitchin (CCL 7011)

Easter 3B



PREPARATION

dawn chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJcTz8gH8P0> (first 1:13 only)

HYMN



Morning has broken (*Singing the Faith* 136)

- 1 Morning has broken
like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.
Praise for the singing!
Praise for the morning!
Praise from them springing,
fresh from the Word!
- 2 Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall
on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung in completeness
where his feet pass.
- 3 Mine is the sunlight!
Mine is the morning
born of the one light
Eden saw play!
Praise with elation,
praise every morning,
God's re-creation
of the new day!

WELCOME

Welcome! We're so glad you could join us for worship on this 3rd Sunday in Easter.

introduce the team:

Reflections: Katherine Harris
Music: Michael Crowley
Readings: David Box
Technology: Stephen Cook

SETTING THE SCENE

Have you ever thought about the fact that Easter is actually six weeks long — not just a day ... or two if you count Easter Monday? Easter lasts for 40 days, from Resurrection Sunday to Ascension Day (which always falls on a Thursday). So this year, we can celebrate Easter until May 13th. So why do all the Easter eggs disappear off the shelves so quickly?!?

Of course, Easter is so much more than chocolate eggs!! Our society seems to get the wrong end of the stick when it comes to Easter. But we aren't the only ones.

The stories in the Bible of that first Easter day are full of people getting the wrong end of the stick. In Luke's gospel, there are three vignettes of the Resurrection. First, the eleven disciples think the women are hysterical when they report meeting angels at Jesus' tomb. Peter runs to check it out and sees the empty linen wrappings in the tomb. But he can't work out what has happened. Later that day, two of Jesus' close followers sadly ponder why He had been crucified as they walk away from Jerusalem — and don't even recognise Jesus as He walks beside them on the road to Emmaus. And finally, when Jesus does appear in the midst of his chosen disciples, they all think He is a ghost.

And all of this happens on the same day!

It was such a short time since Jesus had been so brutally executed. When the loss is recent and the emotions are so raw, it's not surprising they can not comprehend what is happening.

Would we be any different?

It is just not a normal occurrence: people we have known and loved — whose death we grieve, and whose presence we miss more than words can express — suddenly appearing before us, alive and well. Our faith says that we will be reunited at the end of time, but we just don't expect it to happen anytime soon. Death seems so final.

So is it any surprise that the disciples can't get their heads around it? Yes, Jesus had told them it would happen, but they surely couldn't have taken Him at His word. After all, the stories Jesus told, His parables, often had outrageous elements to them. God's Kingdom was coming, but it didn't look anything like what they were expecting.

So even though Jesus had told His disciples that He must suffer and die and would be raised again, how could they believe that He *actually* would be *alive* again three days later after His execution?!?

Our Bible text is taken from Luke's gospel which looks at the third of the Resurrection appearances I mentioned earlier. The two who have met Jesus as they walked on the road to Emmaus have just rushed back to find the eleven disciples gathered together with others of Jesus' followers. But before they can share their story, they are told, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter."

Their minds were reeling.

Jesus — who they knew perfectly well was dead (crucifixion made sure of that) — now alive! How can this be possible?!? How can they believe this is real?!? Doubt and disbelief are mixed with amazement, joy and fear.

Would we be any different?!?

BIBLE TEXT

Luke 24:35-49 (NLT)

Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognised him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

"Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched.

Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things.

"And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven."

HYMN

God of my faith (*Singing the Faith* 629 — to the tune from *Singing the Faith* 186)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 God of my faith, I offer you my doubt,
for life at times seems far too dark for me,
and my belief becomes more insecure,
when worldly cares produce uncertainty. | 2 God of my hope, I offer you my fear,
when I am scared by my anxiety,
when all I hear is suffering and woe
in all my shadows you will walk with me. |
|---|---|

3 God of my joy, I offer you my grief,
when I sink down in sadness or despair,
when in depression I cannot be touched,
I pray in all my depths to find you there.

4 God of my love, I offer you my pain,
when I'm alone and feel nobody cares,
in aching age or in rejected youth,
you bear my cross and dry my human tears.

5 God of my life, I offer you my dreams,
light in the darkness where I hide from view,
light in my faith, my hope, my joy and love,
light in my life and all my life in you.

SERMON

what a difference a day makes

The problem with Easter is that its true meaning has been trivialised, and not just by the world trying to sell us another chocolate egg. We've blunted its edges, removing its power and radical nature. According to Tom Wright, even "the Church has turned Jesus' resurrection into a 'happy ending' after the dark and messy story of Good Friday... a fancy way of saying 'he went to heaven.'" *

But Easter is so much more than that!

Really?!??

Really.

The *world* is actually a *different* place because of Jesus' resurrection. With Easter, the new creation has begun in Jesus — God is remaking the world before our very eyes.

But, to be honest, sometimes I struggle to believe this.

I still see so much that needs to change. You only have to look around, to pay attention to the news to know that things aren't right. There is still so much suffering in this world, so much grief, so much pain, so much that isn't part of God's plan, so much that needs to be made new. People crazy for power, for status and influence, for wealth at the expense of others — people trying to remake the world in *their own* image.

It's hard not to be influenced by the world we live in. As Tom Wright puts it, "For at least 200 years the West has lived on the dream that we can bring justice and beauty to the world all by ourselves."

We want to believe that we are getting better, more compassionate, less prejudiced, more 'woke?' Even Christians have fallen under the spell of our times — trying to do good things ourselves (or maybe in partnership with others), but all too often living as functional atheists — as if it's *all* up to *us*.

We may be children of God, but we act like toddlers. 'I'm going to do it!' 'I want to change things for good.' 'I can do it all *by myself*.'

Maybe you can recognise that in yourself. I know I can.

But how can I live as if Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter morning has changed everything ... most of all, me?!

I think part of the problem comes from seeing Easter as a 'happy ending.' A happy ending means that the story is over. Time to get back to reality. Carry with life as it was before.

But Easter is *not* the end of the story.

And Easter is not a fairytale — it's a true story, and a story of truth.

The gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection follow a similar pattern.

- It starts with raw emotional reality: astonishment, amazement, shock, terror and disbelief from those who knew Jesus best, as they struggle to come to terms with what they were experiencing. There is no heroism here, just real people experiencing something unexpected and overwhelming.
- Words of peace and reassurance are spoken, either from angels or from Jesus Himself, to calm the grieving hearts of those who have loved Him and who have been most impacted His death.

- Physical proof of that Jesus is alive. Whether strips of linen cloths lying (no longer needed) in an empty tomb, bread that is broken and shared, pierced hands and side, or a meal of grilled fish — these tangible items help to ground their bewildered senses in reality.
- Then their minds are opened to the truth contained in the Scripture — God's plan of salvation included the death and resurrection of the Messiah. It had all come true. It was real, no matter how impossible it seemed.
- Everything changed, including (maybe especially) their lives.

Resurrection changes everything.

- The physically dead are now physically alive again. Nobody expected that! Maybe it happens at the end of time, but certainly not in the middle of the here and now. Except it did.
- Life is transformed. Jesus had a new kind of physical body which could appear and disappear and was no longer subject to sickness and death. Yet, it was still undeniably a physical body — breaking bread and dining on grilled fish — not a spirit or a ghost. His body was still recognisably Jesus: the wounds of crucifixion were still there — proof He had died. But also proof He was now alive and present — there, right in front of them. Proof that the world had changed.
- The disciples too changed to be part of this new world which was unfolding before their eyes. No longer fearful and hiding behind locked doors, but living boldly for God's Kingdom.

What a difference a day makes.

Saturday: Jesus is dead, really and truly dead, lying in a tomb.

Sunday: Jesus is alive, really and truly alive ... even more alive than before He died.

This is the earth-shattering bedrock of the Christian faith.

And if it doesn't fit in with our current worldview, maybe it's time for that to change.

In the crucifixion, Jesus took on all the dark powers and evil forces of this world, and His death put an end to them. Jesus' resurrection is not a 'happy ending' — it's a new beginning. What God did for Jesus is what God intends to do for the whole of creation. And God invites us to take our place within it.

Christians are called to be new-creation people here and now. We are to be Easter people, bringing hope to a broken world. And isn't that needed now, more than ever?

What a difference a day makes.

Saturday: a world we all know and understand

Sunday: all is transformed as God's Kingdom breaks through

And you are invited to be part of this transformation, to be part of God's Kingdom break through.

Lord, help each one of us to move from Saturday's world, which we know and understand and can trust in its predictability, to Sunday's resurrection world which seems to have been turned upside down and all our trust is in You.

REFLECTIVE PRAYER

How difficult it is to quiet our hearts and to be still, knowing that God is with us.

So often we pray by reciting lists to God.

Lists of people for whom we care. We list people who need help.

Lists of situations where we feel powerless to make a difference. We list before God the things we want to change.

For the next few minutes, we will pray without words.

We will pray by being still.

We will pray by being quiet in God's presence and listening...

- to the sounds around us
- to thoughts of those who need peace for their troubled hearts or anxious thoughts
- to thoughts of those who need healing and hope
- to signs of God's new creation

birdsong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wq1vHmEflT0>

(2 minutes only)

BLESSING

May you know God's peace and deep love for you and all that you hold dear.
May you find that God's new creation begins with you.

We will end our time together with a pilgrim's prayer. The music from the Taizé community is set to words taken from a longer prayer by St Brigitte of Sweden (based on Psalm 86).

"Lord, show me the way and make me ready to follow it.
Lord, show me the way. Give peace to my heart."

As we journey in faith, may you know God's peace as you follow the way of Christ.

HYMN

Herre, visa mig vägen (*Lord, show me the way*) (Taizé)

*Herre, visa mig vägen,
och gör mig villig att vendre den.
Herre, visa mig vägen.
Ge mitt hjärta ro.*

Lord, show me the way
and make me ready to follow it.
Lord, show me the way.
Give peace to my heart.

Herre, visa mig vägen



Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Together
Guitar

(Seigneur, montre-moi le chemin et prépare-moi à le suivre. Donne-moi la paix du cœur. / Lord, show me the way and make me ready to follow it. Give peace to my heart. / Herr, zeig mir den Weg und mache mich bereit, auf ihm zu gehen. Gib meinem Herzen Frieden. / Señor, muéstrame el camino y prepárame para seguirlo. Dale paz a mi corazón. / Signore, mostrami il cammino e preparami a seguirlo. Donami la pace di cuore. / Panie, wskaż mi drogę i przygotuj mnie, bym nią podążał. Daj pokój memu sercu. *Ste Brigitte de Suède*)

Music: Taizé
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* *The Church must stop trivialising Easter.* Tom Wright.

<https://virtueonline.org/church-must-stop-trivialising-easter-tom-wright>