

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
Easter Day Service, Sunday 9th April 2023
Morning Service 1100
Transcript

Ed. 09.04.23

Call to worship

Gathered in our separate places, yet united in our fellowship this Easter morning, we join our voices with the whole church, across the world and across time, as we proclaim:

Alleluia! Christ is risen

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Let us worship God:

Hymn 410 Jesus Christ is risen today

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning.

Wherever you are on this special day, whether you worship with us regularly, or occasionally, or especially if for the first time, you are welcome to our worship and our fellowship.

Intimations

Gathering words

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life":

an expression so familiar that it has become a cliché, but, for Christians, a statement that sums up the truth of this day –

a truth that broken-hearted women discovered as they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty; a truth the Apostles discovered as, huddled behind locked doors, Jesus appeared among them; a truth countless generations have discovered since then, as the risen Christ has transformed their lives.

For each one, suddenly life began again, with a clean sheet, a fresh page, a new chapter. Listen afresh to the Gospel story; think about it as though you had never heard it before, and rejoice in the new life that God offers to you too.

First Prayer + Lord's Prayer

Now let us pray: I am using this prayer by Bruce Sanguin¹.

O Holy One

we come this morning

like the women on the first Easter morning

prepared to sweep up after death and

to bring as much dignity as we can to the task:

we come to the tomb to make peace with "reality" –

a bruised and broken body,

emblem of the world, our planet, our dreams,

and the triumph of ignorance and violence.

Then word comes to us of an empty tomb,
of strange men, brighter than the morning sun,
announcing a new beginning,

a plan B,

a new creation – Planet B –

and that you, O Easter God, are doing a new thing.

We hear word that Christ has gone on ahead of us,
and now beckons us

¹ © Bruce Sanguin. Used and adapted with permission of the author.

from the rubble and ruin of our lives,
to put away our oils and ointments,
and to let the dead bury the dead.

We hear word of a future,
a future that we are called to create with you.
Christ is risen?
Christ is risen indeed!

We open now to the power of resurrection,
to the loving presence
flowing through the cosmos
and through us,
rolling away stones from the mouths of tombs,
rising out of death,
faithful servant
of eternal life.

We open to the healing power
of our Easter God,
Hidden Wholeness,
weaving tapestries
from what we thought
were merely tattered and torn ends,
death's detritus.

The grave cloths lie,
emptied of form,
in a cave designed for despair
yet telling a different and deeper truth:
that death is but a portal through which
divine emptiness slips away
and into the future,
beckoning us to go to Galilee –
those places and times of our lives
when our hearts first burned with hope –
and await instructions for our Easter mission.

We hear the sound of our becoming
the resurrected body of Christ,
born of the union of desires:
ours, to be Christ's resurrected body in this age,
and yours, that we might find our soul's purpose.
We open to you, arising new in every moment,
our life,
and our hope in the unfolding future,
emerging from our deep commitment
to the present. Amen.

Let us pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name,

Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory for ever. Amen.

Hymn 412 The strife is o'er

Readings: Olivia will read:

Matthew 28: 1-10 (NRSVA): *The Resurrection of Jesus*

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.'

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

Acts 10: 34-43: (NCV)

Peter began to speak:

"I really understand now that to God every person is the same. In every country God accepts anyone who worships him and does what is right. You know the message that God has sent to the people of Israel is the Good News that peace has come through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lord of all people! You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after John preached to the people about baptism. You know about Jesus from Nazareth, that God gave him the Holy Spirit and power. You know how Jesus went everywhere doing good and healing those who were ruled by the devil, because God was with him.

We saw what Jesus did in Judea and in Jerusalem, but the Jews in Jerusalem killed him by hanging him on a cross. Yet, on the third day, God raised Jesus to life and caused him to be seen, not by all the people, but only by the witnesses God had already chosen. And we are those witnesses who ate and drank with him after he was raised from the dead. He told us to preach to the people and to tell them that he is the one whom God chose to be the judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets say it is true that all who believe in Jesus will be forgiven of their sins through Jesus' name."

Today I am using some material by Rev. Bruce Prewer. Among it I found this Statement of Faith:

WE BELIEVE

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

We believe in the God who brought immortality to life
in the gospel of Christ Jesus.

We believe in the Christ who brought faith in a loving Father to life
in the gospel of resurrection.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who brought hope in ourselves to life
in the gospel of boundless renewal.

We believe in grace that is stronger than evil,
in mercy that is larger than suffering,
and in joy that is greater than death.

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! (Bruce Prewer*)

I would certainly agree with that: I expect so would you.

Let us pray:

Affirmation

As we travel through life's mystery,
your light is the only light we need;
your word the only voice we hear -
that still small voice that leads us
to the place where we should be.
Your presence is the only company we need
as we walk this narrow road
Your fellowship the warmth we crave
to help us on our way

May the truth of Easter
The joy of Easter
And the blessings of Easter
Be with us this day and all days. Amen.
- From *'Faith & Worship: Easter Day'*, edited.

A sign of peace:

The risen Jesus stood among his disciples and said, 'Peace be with you'. *Let us offer one another a sign of that peace.*

Hymn 421 Our Lord Christ hath risen

Message:

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

What a rollercoaster of a reading: guards shaking with fear and becoming like dead men; the women getting on with the job; an earthquake; an angel descending from heaven like something from a fantasy movie, and rolling away the stone, telling the women not to be afraid; women the first witnesses to the Easter story, on their way to tell the disciples that *'he has been raised'*, and then falling in joy at the feet of the risen Christ. No wonder there is fear as well as joy!

"Mary Magdalene and the other Mary"

Of the small group of women who stood by Jesus and watched him dying in agony on the cross, only *'Mary Magdalene and the other Mary'* are consistently named in the first three Gospels as observing carefully where Jesus was buried, and as coming again on the Sunday to see the tomb (Matthew 27.61; Matthew 28.1; Mark 15.47; Mark 16.1; Luke 24.10).

Mary Magdalene: we think we know about her. She has traditionally had a bad reputation. In his Easter sermon in the year 591, Pope Gregory I identified Mary from Magdala as the unnamed "sinful woman" who anointed Jesus's feet, and started the widespread and entirely unsubstantiated belief that Mary Magdalene was a repentant prostitute or promiscuous woman. All sorts of legends and slanders grew up around her. Even after 1969, when Pope Paul VI admitted the error, her undeserved lurid reputation has persisted.

Mark's Gospel identifies **the other Mary** as Mary the mother of Joses (Joseph), but in the next verse tells us that Mary Magdalene and *'Mary the mother of James and Salome'* brought spices to anoint the body. (Mark 15:47).

Clearly the two Marys were among the women who provided for Jesus when he was in Galilee (Mark 15.41), and their presence in the Gospel narratives suggests that all three were known as members of the early Christian movement.

Several Marys, and we get confused: confused too because we have four accounts of the resurrection, and they're all a bit different – but, in our time, look at an account of a vehicle collision, and see how the witness statements differ!

People suggest that the contradictions between the accounts mean that they are inventions. If you were setting out to invent a story you wouldn't do it like this, would you? You'd make sure that all the witnesses agreed in what they said – different words, maybe, but basic facts identical. Even more important, you would make sure that the primary witnesses to the events were all men, because the testimony of women in those times was regarded as completely valueless. I think that those very defects tell us that the *overall* story is true.

The Easter Story we think we know is a combination of all four gospel accounts, overlaid by centuries of tradition and practice, so it's almost impossible to look at the Easter story with fresh eyes.

Countless attempts have been made to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. It was very much in the interests of the Roman government and of the Jewish religious leaders to quash the rumours, and to stamp out this heresy from the very beginning. They could have done that very easily. All they had to do was to produce the body of Jesus. They could not do it.

We can never know exactly what happened on that first Easter morning. All four Gospels tell us about the appearances of the Risen Christ, but there is no account of the actual Resurrection itself: no details or image of Jesus rising from the dead: no record of any appearance of Jesus to the Jewish or Roman authorities, or to individuals or groups of people who were not disciples.

There are lots of questions we might ask. Enough here for many Bible-study sessions.

And – you know what? None of this matters!

*It's what it all **means** that is important.*

If you believe that the stone was rolled away, whether by an earthquake or by angels, or by some other means, and that the tomb was empty – that's fine. If you're not sure about some of the details – or all of them – or even if you are quite sure that it *didn't* happen that way at all – fine. Just ask yourself – what does it **mean**?

It means, quite simply, that Jesus lives.

The Gospels tell us that, after his death, Jesus continued to be encountered and experienced, but in strange new ways.

The risen Jesus was able to enter locked rooms.

The risen Jesus could walk and talk with his followers – people who had known him well – without being recognised.

Two thousand years after his death he continues to be encountered and experienced in countless ways by countless people all over the world.

I don't know, and don't try to explain, what happened on that first Easter Sunday, or on the days that followed. But I believe that, if there had been no Easter, we would not know anything about Jesus Christ.

If the story had ended with the crucifixion, he would have been forgotten in a week.

A few traces maybe – like the oblique references in the writing of the Jewish historian Josephus, or the Roman historian Tacitus, but, other than that, he would have been just one

more Jew crucified by the Roman Empire in a bloody century that saw thousands of such executions.

Without Easter we would not have Holy Week, or Good Friday, because there would have been no Christian community to remember, or commemorate, or give any meaning to his death.

When Jesus was arrested, his friends and companions bolted. While he was on trial they were cowering in hiding, terrified that they would be next. One of his closest companions cursed and swore and denied that he knew anything about him. Without Easter, these people would have melted quietly into the background. No doubt they would have mourned for him, maybe talked about how all their high hopes had come to nothing. But they would have kept a low profile, kept out of trouble, tried to return to their ordinary lives – if indeed it is possible to meet with Jesus and ever be the same again.

No, I don't know what happened on that first Easter Sunday. But I know that something so stupendous happened that it changed those terrified men and women into courageous witnesses for the new-born faith – "*The Way*" – boldly proclaiming Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

Between that Friday evening and that Sunday morning, something so outstanding, so unprecedented happened, that, almost exactly 2000 years later, we are still talking about it and honouring the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and regularly re-enacting his last meal with his friends. Something so extraordinary, and so life-changing, took place, that the lives of millions of people have been totally changed, and continue to be changed.

Whatever happened that day, we come back to that simple, factual, world-changing announcement by Mary Magdalene, as recorded in John's Gospel:

"I saw the Lord."

Here we have the fundamental essence of our Christian faith. Christianity is not about knowing *about* Jesus: it is about **knowing Jesus**.

Christianity is not about arguing about Jesus: it is about meeting him.

It is about living our lives in the reality of the risen Christ.

Even in these times of wars and disasters, of human wickedness and human suffering, times of change and uncertainty in the Church, in times of problems and anxiety in our own personal and family lives, it is about holding on to his words:

"Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20)

Christ is risen. Hallelujah.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

To God be the Glory. Amen.

Hymn (Offering) 425 The Saviour died, but rose again

Dedication of Offering

Gracious God,
on this day of all days, there are no words deep enough
to thank you for all your goodness,
no deeds great enough to thank you for all your love,
no gifts costly enough to thank you for your gift in Jesus Christ.
Seeking to express our gratitude for all you have done for us
we bring you now this money, as a token of our love,

a sign of our worship, and a symbol of our discipleship,
offered to you in joyful and grateful praise, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Choir: *"I shall know him"*

Prayers of Intercession: *(from Bruce Prewer*)*

NB Responses:

L: Living Christ

All: comfort and redeem your people.

All our joyful thanksgiving and loving praise we bring to you,
holy Friend, loving Saviour,
glorious God of eternal Easter,
through Christ Jesus our risen Lord. Amen!

It was for all people that Christ Jesus died and rose from the grave. Let us pray for some of them.

Most loving God,
we bring to you our concern and compassion for people whose lives are afflicted by acute sorrow, or evil, or disease; for those who, over this Easter, face an untimely, sudden death. We pray for victims of war, especially at this time for the war in Ukraine, that, through your power, peace with justice will come again; for victims of terrorism, murder, and the carnage on our roads.

L: Living Christ

All: comfort and redeem your people.

We pray for those who endure a lingering death; from cancer, kidney disease, heart disease, or AIDS, or from lack of adequate hospital care and medical supplies. We pray for those who care for the dying and for the bereaved: for families and friends, for pastors, counsellors, funeral directors.

L: Living Christ

All: comfort and redeem your people.

We pray for those who are confronted by blatant evil: for peacemakers and arbitrators, UN workers, peace keepers, aid agencies, prison chaplains; and for those who must deal with more insidious evil: diplomats; parents, teachers and ministers; social workers; psychiatrists, censorship boards; police.

L: Living Christ

All: comfort and redeem your people.

We bring to you those who fight suffering, handicap and disease: nurses and doctors; paramedics; physiotherapists; research scientists; community; kindly neighbours.

Great living Lord of love and joy,
be also with each of us gathered here for this Easter service.
You know our needs better than we do.
In a few moments of silence
we bring our personal concerns to you.

Pause

L: Living Christ

All: comfort and redeem your people.

Lord God,
you know our needs. You have answers that do not occur to us.
Bless us we pray, not with the answers we *want* but with the help that we *need*,
and all to your greater glory.

Through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen!
(From Bruce Prewer, adapted*)

Hymn 411 Christ the Lord is risen today

Closing Words and Benediction:

May the surprise of Easter Day always confound your minds.
May the light of Easter dawn always shine in your eyes.
May the Easter laughter of the disciples be always in your ears.
May the rising path of the companion Christ be always under your feet.
May the footfall of the homely Christ be always at your door.
May the peace of the living Christ be always about your bed;
 Until the day comes when your frayed mortality is no more,
 and the gift of abundant life and immortality with the Lord Jesus
 shall be your very own, intimate wonder and perpetual delight. Amen!
And the blessing of God the Father almighty,
Jesus Christ his risen Son, our Saviour,
and the Holy Spirit our help and guide,
be with us all, and remain with us,
now and always. Amen.

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Doxology:

May God's blessing surround you each day,
As you trust Him and walk in his way,
May his presence within guard and keep you from sin,
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

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