

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
ZOOM Service for Sunday 18th April 2021; Easter 3B

ed 18.04.21

Introduction and Prayer – Martin

Good morning, wherever you are. It's good to speak to you again.

"We are not all gathered in the same building, but we worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all.

Today we read about the two disciples on their return from Emmaus, and their meeting with the others.

A Prayer:

Lord God, whose arms are always open to us,
 as we come to you today, may our hearts and minds be opened anew to your teaching.
 Amen.

Hymn 599 Holy Spirit Hear us

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

In our separate places, but united in our fellowship,
 we meet in the light of this new day,
 giving thanks that God brings peace to our space and time,
 and we open our hearts and minds to his word for us.

Amid the turmoil of our lives, the knowledge of the Risen Christ
 dispels the darkness and distress of doubt and fear,
 bringing new light, new insights, new beginnings, fresh hopes.
 As his woundedness can make us whole,
 so may the love of God, expressed in him
 heal the divisions humanity creates
 between people and nations around the world.

We give thanks that the Lord of Life meets our every need;
 that his risen presence brings the sustenance we crave;
 our hunger is fed, our thirst quenched;
 his Spirit inspires our thoughts, and encourages us
 to use the gifts he has given to each of us
 to his glory, and in the service of his kingdom.

We acknowledge that we fall short of his example.
 Remembering hasty words and thoughtless actions
 that cause hurt to others, often to those we love the most,
 we trust in his renewing grace to lead us in his ways,
 and to help us to bring our lives again
 into harmony with others, and with him, so that,
 in all we do, we may reflect his teaching and his love,
 and discover old and new ways of being his people.

We ask in the name of Jesus,
 and in his words we pray, saying:
*Our Father, who 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, and the power,
and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Readings: Shona will read for us:

1st Reading:

1 John 3:1-7; (New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised)

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Hymn I stand amazed

2nd Reading:

Luke 24:36-48 (NRSVA):

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' 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.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Message:

In the earlier part of the Reading from Luke's Gospel we find two of Jesus's followers walking to Emmaus, about 7 miles from Jerusalem. On the way, Jesus joins them. They don't recognise him, but they're astonished to find that this 'stranger' seems to know nothing about the events of the past week.

In discussion, he *'interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures'*, but it is only later, as they shared a meal together, that *'their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight'*.

They return immediately to Jerusalem to tell the others. Luke tells us, *'While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'* It seems that it was still Sunday when this final scene of the Gospel took place, and we wonder about the two, rushing the seven (uphill) miles back to Jerusalem in time for the meeting with Jesus - but the finer details are not important.

We pick up the story here, as Jesus appears among them. Once again, the first reaction of the disciples is fear, rather than joy. *'They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.'* They still cannot believe what has happened.

Jesus reassures them: the wounds on his hands and his feet are still there to prove it is he. In their astonished confusion, they have forgotten their manners, and Jesus has to ask them, "Have you anything to eat?"

They give him a piece of cooked fish, and he eats it. Once again Jesus patiently explains all these things that had to happen to him. The reality of his suffering and death is now surpassed by the power of his risen presence, and gradually their doubts are resolved, and their fear gives way to joy and amazement.

What are we to make of all this so far?

As we read the Easter stories, we quickly realise that the risen Jesus was not exactly the same as he was before the crucifixion. The risen Jesus can enter locked rooms; he seems to be able to appear and to disappear at will. His friends don't always recognise him, yet he still has the wounds of the crucifixion; he can be touched, and he is able to eat baked fish, so he isn't a ghost. The resurrection was not merely a resuscitation, as the raising of Jairus' daughter, the boy from Nain, and of Lazarus might have been.

All very puzzling, and we find ourselves wondering: what kind of body did the Risen Jesus have? What kind of body might his followers have at the Resurrection?

Scholars struggle with this question, so there is an excuse for us!

Even St. Paul had problems: he grappled with it in 1 Corinthians 15. In a long and difficult chapter, that still leaves us struggling to understand, Paul uses the image of the seed, which dies in the ground before bearing fruit. He seems to be saying that we die as a perishable body, but what is raised is imperishable. We die with a physical body, but rise with a spiritual body. He means that our personality survives.

If you are struggling to grasp all this, so am I! I think we have to accept that there are a lot of things beyond our understanding, things we may not understand in this world.

If our heads are spinning from trying to take in all of this, let's look at what Jesus has to say to his friends in these last days among them.

He reminds them that, in his earthly life, he had taught them that everything written about him in Scripture had to be fulfilled, and he gives practical instructions that point to the whole mission of the church. The church is to be rooted in scripture, and active in mission.

"Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations".

The gospel is not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles – including us.

These last few verses summarise all of Luke's teaching.

The Messiah came, and suffered, and was executed, and rose from the dead.

The message of Jesus, and the message of the infant church, that Luke goes on to write about in Acts, is repentance and forgiveness of sins – personal turning away from sin, and celebrating God's forgiveness, as the Lord's Prayer reminds us.

The message, the journey, starts from Jerusalem. It is to be carried forward by 'witnesses', primarily the witnesses to the Resurrection, but handed over to Stephen, Philip, Paul, and any reader of the Gospel – and of Acts – who responds with an open mind, until it reaches 'to the ends of the earth'. (Acts 1:8)

Jesus promises his followers power from God to cope with their new tasks.

Rather than worrying about the details of the Easter Story, let's look at the results. The inescapable, well-documented fact is that something completely unparalleled happened that first Easter that turned a bunch of terrified men and women, cowering behind locked doors,

into confident joyful people, courageously proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, even at the cost of their lives.

Luke's second book, the Acts of the Apostles, shows the astonishing, rapid spread of 'The Way' across Asia Minor and Europe until it reached Rome. During that time, Christians faced opposition, varying from outright, savage persecution to grudging tolerance, until in 313 AD the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which accepted Christianity.

Ten years later Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire. Today, of the world's major religions, Christianity is the largest, with more than two billion followers.

But the work continues, and will continue until, despite all the problems and setbacks, the whole world will live in The Way that Jesus intended.

We are part of that plan. We are commissioned to carry on the work begun that Easter. We all have our part to play.

Let's do what we can! Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

Hymn 559 There is a redeemer

Prayer for Others and Blessing

Let us pray:

Today, we pray for the Queen and for all the Royal family.
In their grief and loss may they find comfort and support in one another,
and in their faith in God and life eternal.

We pray for all who grieve for the loss of loved ones,
especially grieving people separated by distance or restrictions
from families anxious to be with them to offer comfort and support.
In their loss, in their grief, their solitude,
may they be upheld by their faith, and by those around them.

We pray for all those affected by Covid;
for those suffering pain, illness, or disability;
those awaiting treatment, or fearful of treatment,
those uncertain about vaccination.

We pray for people of faith, and people of no faith;
for those with purpose, and those with no purpose in life;
for those who have a clear direction,
and those who flounder, uncertain in all of life's complexities.
We pray for those whose mental health brings them anguish, confusion and loneliness,
and for all who feel abandoned, unwanted, unloved and un-helped.

For the world and its people, Lord, we pray.

We pray for countries at war with other countries, or within themselves,
for countries immersed in violence,
where the causes of disputes are confused or forgotten,
for their peoples, fearing for their lives and livelihoods,
facing an uncertain future;
for people damaged, isolated, abused;
for Myanmar, Ethiopia, Mozambique;
for the people of Ireland and Northland Ireland,
Catholics and Protestants, for those of faith and those of none.

For the world and its people, Lord, we pray.

For Christians seeking the best ways to live their lives in faith,
trying to look beyond the present to the future,
beyond our own needs to the needs of the world and its peoples;
for countries with surging Covid cases;
countries with poor infrastructure and insufficient resources,
short of vaccines, with no prospect of national vaccination,
and for those trying to resolve all such problems.

For ourselves we pray that we may see the needs around us,
speak up for the poor and disadvantaged,
find opportunities in our lives to improve the lives of others.

Amidst all these prayers we bring
those concerns that weigh most heavily upon us:

Pause

For the world and for all its people,
Lord, we pray, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Christ is risen in our world:
he bears the love of God for the world to share.
May he be alive in our hearts, our words, our activities.
This day and this week, may you stay safe in his ways,
And the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you all, now and always.
Amen