

Easter – Worship/Message



Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

"We are here to give you the good news, that God has fulfilled the promise by raising Jesus from the dead." (Acts 13, 32-33)

"Christ is risen; he is risen indeed!"

Prayer:

Glory be to your, God, our strength and our redeemer. The vacant cross and the empty tomb vindicate your claim that the love which suffers is the love which saves. So fill your people with joy and your Church with celebration that the world may know that your holy Son Jesus is not a dead hero we commemorate but the living Lord we worship, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be our praise for ever. **AMEN**

Collect:

Lord of life and power, through the mighty resurrection of your Son, you have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ, may reign with him in glory, who with you and the Holy Spirit is alive, one God, now and for ever.

AMEN

A hymn:

'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, born 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!

[Stewart Townend and Keith Getty]

Reading:

Jn.20, 1-18

V.16-17: *"Jesus said to her, 'Mary'. She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

Dear friend.

In one of Jesus best-known and best-loved stories – the parable of the prodigal son – we hear of the father saying to the servants as he instructs them to prepare a celebration feast after the return of his son: *"Let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."* And the same he says to his other son, the older brother, who had refused to join in the celebration: *"It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."* (Lk.15, 11-32)

This is quite a striking way of putting it! I hope you think so too. Because how was the son 'dead'? In what sense was he dead? He had only left for a while and then returned! Why does Jesus, who does so deliberately and thoughtfully, use the words 'dead' and 'alive' with regard to the prodigal son and his whereabouts? What is he saying, and what does he want us to understand, about our own whereabouts? What is it that is going on here which will shed light on the significance of his own resurrection, his own 'was dead, and is alive', the significance of what he says as the risen Lord: *"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades"* (Rev.1, 18)?

Well, it is this: Jesus has the right way round, what the world has the wrong way round. To the world's mind the son is alive – after all, he walks and talks, makes plans and decisions and friends, he laughs and cries, he falls on hard times and plans for better, he is anxious about things and seeks a way out etc. Surely, these very things mean he is *not* dead but alive, they are only *possible because* he is alive! You see, to the world's mind life is the thing that makes everything else possible until death puts an end to it. And the greatest pain and sorrow death causes, and why we fear it so, is that it breaks, destroys the relationships we stand in.

On this understanding it makes little sense for Jesus to say 'he was dead', he should perhaps better have had the father say 'he almost died, but thanks goodness he is alive!' Yet he did not. Because the truth is the son died when he removed himself from the fellowship/ communion with his father!

What Jesus says is that life (which when it is life is not subject to death) flows out of one's fellowship with God. *"This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* (Jn.17,3) But what proceeds from life that is not in fellowship with God is death – bears the mark of it and is subject to it. That is what Jesus points out by calling the son in his parable 'dead'.

Paul reckons in the same way when he says of those who have come to Christ: *"You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world."* (Eph.2, 1) He refers to what it is that removes a person from the fellowship with God – our sins with which we sin against him. It is sin which casts us into the hands and power of death. Is not the fear which is pressing upon us and the brokenness of human fellowship a sign of this?

But now there are also the words '...is alive'! In order to hear them we must behold the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is alive! His resurrection is to all who receive him the ground of their renewed fellowship with God the Father! *"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."* (1Jn.1, 3-4)

From the moment of his birth he was given the name 'Immanuel' – a program of what his life was to be all about: God with us, that is man brought into fellowship with God through him who bears the sins of the world. And his resurrection is the seal on it, God's Yes and Amen!

Let us hear it again in Paul's words, following on from what is quoted above Eph.2: *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus."* (vv.4-7)

Dear friend, Christ is risen; he is risen indeed! And his is the living, all-conquering voice that says to all that belong to him and come to him in faith: *"Fear not!"*

Let us think of this and hold fast to it in all prayer and rejoicing. *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."* (Col.3, 1-4)

AMEN



“Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?’ ... But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.” - 1Cor.15, 54-58

Take time to pray, giving thanks to God for the resurrection of Christ and his presence with us always and praying for everything that is on your heart on behalf of others for Jesus’ sake; Ps.145, 18: *“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”*

“Lord, at this Easter time we ask you to increase our faith, our hope and our love. Give us the faith that overcomes the world and enables us to face both life and death calm and unafraid. Give us the hope that looks beyond the mortal life and grasps hold of the things unseen and eternal. Give us the love that binds us more closely to one another, and to you our risen Lord; to whom be all glory and praise, dominion and power, now and for ever.” **AMEN**

“Help us, O Lord our God, to hear and obey your call to us, as those who have been raised with Christ, to seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at your right hand; that our thoughts may be set on heavenly things, not on the things of earth, and we may be partakers of his risen life until we are manifested with him in glory.” **AMEN**

Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father. Set out, then, on a new life with Christ.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you all

AMEN