

Easter Day Worship Sheet
4th April 2021 at 10.30am

Welcome to worship on this Easter Day. I am sorry that it is still not possible for us all to meet on the church premises today, but if you are isolated, you are not alone, as we worship God together this Easter. As you prepare for worship, I suggest that you light a candle, reminding us that the darkness of Good Friday is over and the dawn of Easter Day has come. As Easter people, we live in the light of our risen Lord. God bless you richly today and always.

Jane and Hannah, join me in wishing you a Happy and blessed Easter. Stephen.



Call to Worship

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Hymn – “Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!” StF 298

Opening Prayer

O Lord God, Eternal Creator, you dwell in the hearts of all who worship you today. We praise and thank you for raising Jesus from the dead and setting us free to worship and adore you. To you belongs all the honour!

Jesus Christ, Merciful Saviour, you meet us when we turn to you. On that first Easter morning you rose from the grave to conquer sin and death for ever. To you belongs all the glory!

Holy Spirit, Divine Presence, you are the very Breath of Life. We receive the peace of the risen Christ as did those first disciples in the Upper Room. To you belongs all the praise!

Pause

O God, the Three-in-One, we confess that our lives have been full of death and hate instead of life and love. Forgive us our sins, and strengthen in us all that is good.

Pause

As we receive your assurance of forgiveness, you fill us afresh with love and life, compelling us to pour them out into the lives of others. Amen.

Hymn - "See what a morning, gloriously bright" StF 309

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.² Let Israel say:
'His love endures for ever.'

¹⁴ The Lord is my strength and my defence;
he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
'The Lord's right hand has done mighty things!

¹⁶ The Lord's right hand is lifted high;
the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!'

¹⁷ I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

¹⁸ The Lord has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.

- 19 Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.
- 20 This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.
- 21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.
- 22 The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
- 23 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.
- 24 The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'



John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' ¹⁴ At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

¹⁷ Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Hymn – “See what a morning, gloriously bright” StF 309

<https://youtu.be/XJrUEVKGXTQ>

Reflection - “Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” – John 20:15

After the year which we have all been through, whether we are today meeting on the church premises or at home, it feels as though we are all gathered in the garden. The dawn has come and the sun is rising into the sky. Flowers are blossoming and birds are singing. We are in the garden, with a tomb, an empty tomb. We are joyful on his new day, a day full of hope and new life. Yet, like on that first Easter morning, some of us, deep inside, may still be weeping.

Good Friday is only two days away. We remember how then the sky turned as dark as night for three hours, (Luke 23:44), as Jesus hanged dying on the cross. After Jesus had died; after a spear had been thrust into his side; after the bloody nails had been removed from his hands and feet; and after he had been taken down from the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a secret disciple of Jesus, and Nicodemus, who had first seen Jesus at night, got Pilate's permission to take Jesus' body. They carried out the burial rituals and laid Jesus' body in a new tomb near where he had been crucified, (John 20:38-42). The next day was the Sabbath, a particularly holy one as it was Passover, and so no one could go to the tomb. It was early on the next day, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.

In his gospel, St John, makes much of darkness and light. On Good Friday and Easter Saturday, everything seems dark and as near to hopeless as life may ever get. We recall the Prologue to John's Gospel and that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and lived among us. He was the light of all people. The light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. On Good Friday and Easter Saturday it may feel as though the darkness has overcome the light, as Jesus lies in the dark tomb. Having lived through the darkness of those days, Mary Magdalene, out of her love for Jesus, comes to the tomb. She didn't think of the danger of walking the streets of Jerusalem in the darkness of the early hours. She was just focussed on going to see Jesus. She has lived through such pain and sorrow over the past few days. She couldn't imagine anything else going wrong, but it had. The tomb was empty. After Simon Peter and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, have returned home, Mary is left outside the tomb weeping. Mary thinks that Jesus' body had now been taken grave robbers and she has no idea of where she can find him.

Then, we have the wonderful encounter. I never tire of this amazing passage, but this year it seems to have a greater impact than ever. As Mary is weeping and talking to the angels, who have just appeared in the tomb – Peter and

John missed them! Something makes her turn around. Perhaps she hears something rustling behind her. She turns away from the tomb and sees a man, whom she believes is a gardener. Perhaps he was silhouetted in front of the bright, rising sun, or maybe he looked so ordinary and down to earth that he could have been the gardener.

Mary does not know who it is, but John tells us that it is Jesus. We know that it is not the gardener speaking to Mary, but Jesus himself and what are the first words which the risen Jesus speaks? They are simply, "Woman, why are you weeping?" followed by, "For whom are you looking?" The first words of our living Lord are not words of triumph declaring that he is alive. He's not like someone on "The Apprentice" blowing his own trumpet, telling everyone how great he is and what wonderful things he has done whilst everyone else was being so human and powerless. Jesus doesn't say anything about himself, but simply asks Mary why she is weeping. We might think that this is a silly question, as she is standing outside a tomb and he is Jesus. He knows Mary better than she knows herself. He knows why she is crying, but he gives her the opportunity to share the reason for her tears.

This Easter as we gather in the garden to worship, we have all, over the past year, been through our own Good Fridays and Easter Saturdays in various ways. Jesus, today, asks us the question, "Why are you weeping?" or "Why have you been weeping?" I wonder how we would reply. We have probably all longed to be with family and friends, We have missed coming to church and meeting face to face. We have yearned to be able to travel freely. We have been desperate to get on the golf course or in the swimming pool, or to go to the theatre and concerts. Those who enjoy retail therapy have possibly itched to get to the non-essential shops. Others are hungry to get to a restaurant or meet friends for a coffee without needing to shelter from the wind or desperate to invite folks round for tea. We could go on listing the things which we have missed and can't wait to do when it is safe to do so. Others maybe weeping because they have lived through and, some are still experiencing, dark days of illness, getting Covid-19, being in hospital without any visitors and bereavement. So, inwardly and outwardly, we might find ourselves on this Easter morning weeping with Mary.

As we weep, we are also aware of the many good things and blessings which we have discovered over the past year. The pandemic has made us see what is important in life. It has encouraged us to appreciate the natural world and the beautiful place in which we live. We have been grateful for modern technology enabling us to keep in contact with and see our families and friends down the road and across the world. It has been hard not being able to meet for worship, but the lockdown has made us focus on the heart of our faith. All the trappings of church life were stripped away and we were left with us and God. Once again we realised that at the end of the day, the most important thing in our faith is our relationship with God. We had time to spend with Jesus and rediscover his love for us. When everything else in life,

which we had always taken for granted, didn't happen, we still had Jesus. We knew that with all the uncertainties of the past twelve months, Jesus would be the same and we could trust him with everything. We had to put our faith in Jesus, knowing that he gives us hope. Even when God has felt distant and we've felt abandoned, just as Jesus did on Good Friday, we've known deep inside that Jesus was and is with us. It has been a time of darkness and light, of death and life.

Jesus asks Mary, "Why are you weeping?" and then "For whom are you looking?" Mary tells him. Jesus asks us, "Whom are you looking for?" Throughout John's gospel, people have been looking for Jesus, from the time when John the Baptist pointed him out, saying, "Look, here is the Lamb of God" (John 1:35-51) to when some Greeks approach Philip in Jerusalem, (John 12:21). Jesus asks Mary and us. Are we looking for Jesus? If so, like Mary, we won't find him in the tomb.

Ten years ago last January, I was blessed with a trip to the Holy Land. I was really looking forward to visiting the Garden tomb and I eagerly queued for my turn to go inside the tomb and see the stone shelf on which Jesus' body was possibly laid. Anticipation built as I approached the door to enter and when I finally got inside, I was disappointed. It was interesting, but it wasn't amazing as I expected it to be in such a holy place. Then I turned around to go out and saw a sign on the door. It read, "He is not here. He is risen". An overwhelming sense of joy filled me as I thought, "Idiot Skinner! Of course he's not here. He has risen. He's out in the garden, in the street, in the market place, in the home, out in the world."

Looking for Jesus, we still find him in the world. This year, we have seen him on the NHS front-line, supporting Food Banks, in supermarkets, in classrooms, in hospitals, behind refuse trucks, delivering post and parcels and in hundreds and thousands of small acts of kindness and thoughtfulness. Worries have been eased, hunger has been fed and tears have been turned into smiles. Problems have not gone away, but people's love and care for one another has helped people through the difficult times. Looking for Jesus, we find him next to us turning our darkness into light, giving us hope for the future. Hope, not built on empty wishful thinking, but hope built on painful suffering on the cross and glorious resurrection bringing victory over death, eternal life.

The risen Jesus asks two questions and when Mary responds, he doesn't give an answer, but says her name, "Mary". Immediately, she knows that the gardener is in fact Jesus. As Henri Nouwen comments in his book, "The Road to Daybreak"* "When Jesus calls Mary by her name, he is doing much more than speaking the word by which everyone knows her, for her name signifies her whole being. Jesus knows Mary of Magdala. He knows her story: her sin and her virtue, her fears and her love, her anguish and her hope. He knows every part of her heart. Nothing in her is hidden from him. He knows her even more deeply and more fully than she knows herself. Therefore, when he utters

her name he brings about a profound event. Mary suddenly realizes that the one who truly knows her truly loves her.”

Henri Nouwen reflects on how such a deeply moving story touches his fear as well as his desire to be known. He often wonders if people who know every part of him, including his deepest, hidden thoughts and feelings, really do love him. He is often tempted to think that people will only love him on the condition that he does this or that and if they really knew him then they wouldn't love him. In this simple encounter, Nouwen senses a true religious moment as all fear is gone. The one who knows her most deeply is not moving away from her, but coming towards her offering her unconditional love. This is a healing moment as Mary knows that she is fully known and fully loved. All fear has gone and all has become love. Jesus sends her to tell his brothers that “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”. There is no difference between Jesus and those whom he loves. We too share the same intimacy with God the Father as Jesus does.

As we gather in the garden on this Easter Day, Jesus comes to us as well, knowing us by name and loving us with unconditional love. Jesus knows us better than ourselves. He knows what life has been like since last Easter Day. He knows when we've been in the darkness and when we've been in the light, and the dawn and dusk. Not only does he know about it. He was there with us. Today, whether we are quietly weeping inside with Mary outside the tomb or full of joy with Mary as she went to tell the disciples the good news, Jesus knows how we are feeling; calls us by name; and loves us with unconditional love. We know that we are Easter people and live in the joy of knowing that we are fully known and fully loved. On Easter Day we know that Jesus loved us, with the whole world, so much that he died for us and rose again. We now enjoy forgiveness and life in all its fulness. Our belief and following Jesus means that we no longer walk in darkness, but in the light of Easter morning, the light of our risen Lord, who gives us eternal life. I read one of Pete Grieg's quotations last week. He wrote, “The bad news is that we are one day nearer our death. The good news is that we are one day closer to being with Jesus for eternity”. Happy Easter! Amen.

*“The Road to Daybreak: A spiritual Journey”, Henri Nouwen, (New York: Doubleday, 1988)

Hymn – “I know that my Redeemer lives” StF 303

Prayers

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son;

Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

On this Easter Day, we remember those who have gone before us to glory. May we, like them, inherit your eternal kingdom.

We pray for all who are fearful today: people living alone; people who have endured great trials; people who are scared for each new day. Come among them and breathe your resurrection peace.

We pray for your worldwide church, united today in joyful acclamation of the risen Christ. May we, your church, daily witness to the life of the risen Christ in our own lives through our love for God, self and neighbour.

We pray for the leaders of the world, and for the people they govern. Endue them with wisdom and justice, so that they might govern all people with equity.

Finally we pray for ourselves. In Christ we are indeed more than conquerors. May Alleluia! be our triumphant song today and always.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn – “Thine be the glory” StF 313

The Blessing

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us today and always. Amen.