

Morning Worship April 26th 2020 'God is with us'

Call to Worship

Lord, like the disciples walking to Emmaus, we often fail to recognize you. Open our eyes to see you today. Open our ears to hear what you are saying to us today, Lord, as you did with those walking to Emmaus. Spend time with us in fellowship, we pray, until our hearts burn within us.
Amen

Hymn STF 297: 'Christ is alive! Let Christians sing'

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
His cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
His love in death shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
he comes to claim the here and now,
and conquer every place and time.

Not throned above, remotely high,
untouched, unmoved by human pains
but daily, in the midst of life,
our Saviour, with the Father reigns.

In every insult, rift and war,
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
he suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, though ever crucified.

Christ is alive! His Spirit burns
through this and every future age,
till all creation lives and learns
his joy, his justice, love and praise.
Brian Wren

Reading: Isaiah 43:1-3 (TLB)

Lord who created you, O Israel, says: Don't be afraid, for I have ransomed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up—the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, your Saviour, the Holy One of Israel.

Prayers In response to these words of encouragement we pray:

Heavenly Father, you are the creator of all things and we praise you. We thank you for the beauty of your creation and for the signs of new life all around us this spring time. We praise you that the unusual quietness, we are experiencing at the moment helps us hear more clearly the beautiful sounds of birdsong, rain and the wind.

Forgive us when we shut our eyes and ears to all the beauty you have created.

We have sung the great hymn of celebration 'Christ is alive', and as Christians we believe this with all our hearts. We praise you, that in Christ, you have saved us from all for our sins.

Forgive us when we take for granted all that Christ has done for us

It is so wonderful that you know each one of us personally and always remember our names

Forgive us when we forget how important we are to you

You have promised to be with us through the best and the worst of times. You have said you will walk beside us though the deep waters of trouble and the fire of oppression.

Forgive us that we often forget your presence and worry so much about what may happen to us and to those we love

We believe that you are all powerful - the Lord our God, our Saviour and the Holy one.

Forgive us for our lack of real faith and trust.

We are truly sorry that we sometimes doubt you Lord and fail to live as we should. Please fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may live to your glory in the future.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

Our Lord's Prayer

Traditional

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Contemporary

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.

Reading 1 Peter 1:17-23 (NIV) *This letter was written by Peter the Apostle to encourage Christians who were suffering persecution for their faith.*

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Hymn STF 351: 'In Christ alone'

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.
Keith Getty/Stuart Townend

Prayers of Intercession

Heavenly Father:

we pray for all who are affected by the Corona-virus, through illness or isolation or anxiety,
We particularly pray for those who have no money coming in or have no gardens for recreation
that they may find provisions and means of recreation.

Lord, hear us and show us how to help.

We pray for those who are guiding the nations at this time, and shaping national policies,
especially as they try to find much needed supplies and arrange the exit strategy from the
Lockdown.

Lord, hear us and show us how to help.

We pray for medical workers, carers and all those in essential jobs-
Please protect them and give them the equipment and the strength and skills they need.

Lord hear us and show us how to help.

We pray for the vulnerable and the fearful, those who suffer from mental illness and for all who are desperately ill, especially remembering the dying and the bereaved.
May they all know your comfort and peace

Lord hear us and show us how to help.

We pray for those who advise on ways of stemming the spread of the disease and those searching for a vaccine . May all nations share their wisdom, skills and discoveries so that ways to conquer Covid-19 may soon be found.

Lord hear us and show us how to help.

We pray for members of our churches and those who lead them that they may find ways of bringing spiritual help to others at this time of difficulty. May they be always ready to speak of your care and to show your love through deeds of kindness.

Lord hear us and show us how to help.

We pray for all those we are concerned for, or in touch with... (In a few moments of silence let us name them before God)

Lord hear us and show us how to help.

Finally Lord, we bring ourselves to you asking that you will make us aware of your presence with us. Help us to remember that you care far more than we ever could and that you are all powerful. Teach us to listen to you and learn from you during this time of crisis and make us ready for whatever the future holds.

Lord please accept all these prayers for we ask them in the name of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reading Luke 24:13-35 On the Road to Emmaus (NIV)

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹ but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our

companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Hymn STF 308: ‘On the journey to Emmaus...’

On the journey to Emmaus, with our hearts cold as stone,
the one who would save us had left us alone.

Then a stranger walks with us – and, to our surprise,
he opens our stories and he opens our eyes.

And our hearts burned within us as we talked on the way,
how all that was promised was ours on that day.

So we begged him, “Stay with us, and grant us your word” –
we welcomed the stranger, and we welcomed the Lord.

And that evening at table, as he blessed and broke bread;
we knew it was Jesus arisen from the dead.

Though he vanished before us, we knew he was near –
the life in our dying, and the hope in our fear.

On our journey to Emmaus, in our stories and feast,
with Jesus we claim that the greatest is least.

And his words burn within us: “Let none be ignored;
who welcomes the stranger shall welcome the Lord.”

Marty Haugen

Reflection

A few years ago there was a news report about an American Army veteran called John Crabtree. He had been wounded in Vietnam and was on a permanent disability pension.

One day, out of the blue, he received an official notification from the government of his own death. Needless to say, this was quite a shock! Mr. Crabtree wrote to the government telling them that he was very much alive and would like to continue receiving his benefits. The letter did no good. He then tried talking to officials on the phone but still no success!

Finally, John Crabtree contacted a local television station, which ran a human-interest story about him. During the interview, the reporter asked him, "How do you feel about this whole ordeal?" John Crabtree laughed and said, "Well, I feel a little frustrated by it. After all, have you ever tried to prove that you're alive?"

You will remember that while He was alive, Jesus had constantly been talking to the disciples about his death and how he would, after three days, rise from the dead. In spite of this, the empty tomb, seen by Peter and John, the vision of angels at the tomb and the meeting with Jesus, whom Mary took for the gardener, all failed to convince the disciples that Jesus was alive.

It is certainly true that, after His resurrection, Jesus had to work very hard to prove he was alive. *He still does!*

In the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead, two very depressed disciples are making their way to Emmaus, a village a few miles from Jerusalem. As they walk they are having an intense debate about the meaning of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus and what the stories about his tomb being empty might mean. A stranger catches up with them and asks them what they are discussing. They don't recognise the man who has joined them but his question makes them stop walking and they stand still with looks of devastation on their faces. They are very surprised that anyone, who has been in Jerusalem over the last few days, didn't know what had happened there.

As we watch them telling Jesus the details of the end of his own life, we are in the privileged position of knowing more than the characters in the story know, (apart from Jesus, of course!). We know the absolutely *key fact* that man who has joined them *is* the risen Jesus. *They* don't recognise Him whereas *we* know it's Jesus.

It's a bit like being at a pantomime when someone comes up behind the actor and we, in the audience, all shout out, "***He's behind you!***" The actor never seems to turn the right way to see him. In this Bible story we see the despondent disciples telling the risen Jesus how all their hopes of Jesus being the Messiah went when He was crucified and buried.

When they tell Jesus, how the women went to the tomb early in the morning but didn't find his body, we want to shout out ***'He's beside you!!! You're talking to Him!!!!'***

Frequently, in the resurrection stories Jesus isn't recognised at first. He is *the same* but somehow *different*. Something prevented His followers from recognising the risen Jesus- the person they most wanted to see!

The story of the journey to Emmaus clearly illustrates how, as we journey through life, Jesus journeys with us, It also shows how we can fail to see Jesus or recognise His presence and how things change dramatically when we do eventually recognise Him

In our present, upsetting circumstances, of this Coronavirus Epidemic we may have more difficulty than usual in recognising the presence of the risen Jesus with us. We are used to feeling that He is there with us when we meet with groups of fellow believers, in the familiar surroundings of our church in meetings and especially in our weekly services. It's different being isolated with our families or alone in our own homes, when we cannot feel part of a physical fellowship, meet with other believers or shake hands with them. The virus has knocked us for six and continues to do so relentlessly, through the restrictions placed on our lives and the devastating daily news reports which can grind us down. Like those bewildered disciples on the Emmaus road, we can't understand what has hit us. We are shocked and saddened and concerned about the future.

Those two disciples going to Emmaus were certainly shocked, disillusioned and concerned for the future. When Jesus caught up with them on the road we are told that, "*they stood still, their faces downcast*", but later, they returned to Jerusalem with burning, joyful hearts. What caused this change?

Clearly, full recognition of the truth that Jesus was alive came when they when they recognised Him as He broke bread at the table. However, their breathless, excited discussion, as they hurried back to Jerusalem, shows us that a big change had come over their whole view of things when Jesus explained the Scriptures to them on their journey *to* Emmaus. It was *then* that the

truth began to dawn. They said “***Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?***”

There are many things God may want to teach us during this Coronavirus Epidemic. Let's hope that one of the things we learn is that Jesus is *always with us*, as He promised He would be. He walks with us, yes, and *sits* with us too, particularly in our dark hours during these trying days. We will not always *feel* or *recognise* His presence but we know He will always be with us. If we quietly wait for Him, and listen to Him speaking in His Word, He will make Himself alive to us as He did to those disciples going to Emmaus.

Jesus came alive for John Wesley when his heart was, “***strangely warmed***” in that famous Aldersgate Street meeting in 1738, and at the end of His life he declared “***The best of all is God is with us***”. How wonderful it would be, if, during this difficult time, we learned, in a deeper way, to recognise the presence of Jesus and then, returned to ‘normal life’, with burning hearts, eager to tell everyone that ***we know He is alive and is always with us.***

Hymn STF 610: ‘Best of all is God is with us’

Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.

Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, and death is gain'.

Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Andrew Pratt

Blessing

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in Him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Please be assured that we are still here if you need anything at all during this time.

The circuit staff can be contacted by calling 01933 312778, 01933 622137, 07305 893449

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