

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Easter Sunday

9th April 2023

The Rev'd Paul Whittle

Call to Worship

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!

Exult, all creation around God's throne! Jesus, our King, is risen!

Sound the trumpet of salvation! **Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!**

Rejoice, O Earth, in shining splendour, radiant in the brightness of our King!

Jesus has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!

Rejoice, O holy Church! Exult in glory! The risen Saviour shines upon you!

Let this place resound with joy, as we sing,

echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

adapted from the Exultet

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Forgiveness

Risen Lord Jesus, we celebrate this day.

May we know Your joyful presence in our time of worship.

Help us as we look to share something of the light, joy, peace and hope of Easter.

Loving God, with the Psalmist we praise Your majesty.

Oh give thanks to God who is so good,

to God whose steadfast love endures for ever.

Oh God, You are our strength and our might.

You have become our salvation.

Open to us the gates of righteousness

that we may enter through them,

and give thanks to You, our God.

Give us light.

And God, may that light shine through us,

illuminating those things that are wrong in what we do,

what we say, how we live.

Forgive us our failings.

Help us to live as a forgiven people.
We remember that the Scriptures tell us:
if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
Thanks be to God.

Prayer of Illumination

Living God, may your light guide and direct our path.
In Jesus' Name we ask it. Amen.

All-Age Activity

(Note: this is my adaption of an idea that will not be new to many.)

Today we celebrate Easter. There are many ways in which we mark Easter, but for many of us chocolate is part of it; so let's have a chocolate story. What is a chocolate story? A chocolate is a story with lots of chocolate (and I have brought along the chocolate in today's story.)

As you can imagine, with all the events of Holy Week, it was now CRUNCH(IE) time. It had really been quite a week. At the beginning Jesus had caused great disruption as he tried to get across to the temple traders the FAIR TRADE message. He had had the (TURKISH) DELIGHT of having his feet unexpectedly washed with expensive perfume. As the week reached its climax Jesus and the disciples had shared a very special meal. They had borrowed the room in which it was eaten and so it was a bit like a PICNIC.

And then all sorts of things went wrong as the big attempt was launched to FUDGE the true message that Jesus had come to bring.

But that could never succeed because the message that Jesus proclaimed was a DIVINE message from God. When Jesus was on the Cross there were some who thought that a GALAXY of angels would sweep down to rescue him. That wasn't going to happen. But what did happen certainly sent a RIPPLE of God's love across the world.

Jesus knew that God's love reached all the way to MARS and beyond. Indeed, it covers more than the whole MILKY WAY. Jesus wanted to let people know that God's love isn't tiny, like a FLAKE. Rather, it is so amazing that you can hardly believe its BOUNTY.

And Jesus' death wasn't the end at all. After Good Friday comes Easter Day. Apart from chocolate, one of the other things we often mention on Easter Day is chicks. Chicks hatch from eggs. And that's why the special chocolate of Easter Day reminds us of a chick hatching from an egg. It's a sign of new life. So, at Easter, we can enjoy all sorts of chocolate, but especially and always an EASTER EGG.

Reading

St John 20:1-18

Sermon Notes

Introduction – Names: for me the stand-out moment in John’s version of the resurrection story is when Jesus speaks Mary’s name, very much not what she was expecting. Calling people by name is important, and we might compare Biblical statements about how well God knows us, for example, Jesus’ statement about the numbering of the hairs of our head – Matthew 10:26-31.

Context – Of course, the background to this story lies in the events of Holy Week. The disciples, particularly the twelve, but also surely the wider group, which included the likes of Mary Magdalene, had been on something of a rollercoaster as events unfolded. The joyful celebration of (what we now know as) Palm Sunday seemed a lot more than five days away when they hit the horror of Good Friday.

Focus on Mary Magdalene – Mary M had come a long way. She had been excited to be part of the wider disciple group and, for once, felt valued. Like the rest, she had had high hopes as to where Jesus would take them. But that had all come crashing down with the sham trial, and then the crucifixion. Devasted, she had come to the tomb at the first possible opportunity, early on Sunday morning, to pay her last forlorn respects.

The unexpected scene – We are not told whether Mary was worried about the barrier the stone should have been. But what she found was an open and empty tomb. She ran for help or, at least, to tell someone; and Peter and a second (unidentified) disciple rush to examine the scene for themselves. We are told what Peter did, but not what he thought. However, the other disciple believed. As we are told they did not yet understand the resurrection, this belief must have been something about Jesus ‘going’ to be with God.

Mary’s encounter with Jesus – Mary then looks into the tomb for herself and has a brief exchange with two angels (messengers) before, through her tears, seeing another figure in the garden. She assumes it is the gardener and wonders if he might have moved the body. But then comes the moment that totally transforms things for Mary as Jesus speaks her name. They then have a conversation in which Jesus tells her not to touch him, and talks not about resurrection, but about ascension, though the two are bound up with each other. Jesus is risen and will ascend.

Mary’s commission (and ours) – So, Mary goes and shares her experience. ‘I have seen the Lord.’ I wonder if we share our experience of God in the way that we should. I wonder if we sometimes rush on to other things and miss out on something very special. (I wish Peter and his mate had stayed in the garden a little longer, because they might just have

shared Mary's encounter with the risen Jesus at that point.) I wonder how good we are, both through what we do and in what we say, at proclaiming that Jesus is risen.

Affirmation of Faith

As followers of Jesus Christ, living in this world—which some seek to control, but which others view with despair—we declare with joy and trust: **our world belongs to God!**

From the beginning, through all the crises of our times, until His Kingdom fully comes, God keeps covenant forever. **Our world belongs to God!**

We rejoice in the goodness of God, renounce the works of darkness, and dedicate ourselves to holy living, for **our world belongs to God!**

As committed disciples, called to faithful obedience, and set free for joyful praise, we offer our hearts and lives to do God's work in his world, for **our world belongs to God!**

With tempered impatience, eager to see injustice ended, we expect the Day of the Lord. And we are confident that the light which shines in the present darkness will fill the earth when Christ appears for **our world belongs to God!**

adapted from material from the Christian Reformed Church.

Intercessions

Living God, we pray for the church, your people, called to shine as your light, to give flavour as your salt. Help us, your people, called out of darkness into your marvellous light, aliens and exiles in this world, to bring the joy and hope of Easter into the communities in which we are set.

We pray for the world, a world which you created, and which we have so damaged. We pray for justice and peace. We pray for those in positions of government and influence that they may work for the good of all. We pray for those living in fear of violence and conflict, for those sufficiently desperate to risk life and limb and become refugees, for those who experience abuse because of who they are. Help us to do what we can, little though it seems, to make this world a better place.

We pray also for those we know, and those we don't, who have especial need of our prayers – those who are sick; those facing particular challenges, opportunities, struggles, possibilities; those who are lonely; those who have been bereaved.

God of life, help us to be people of hope. Make us influencers for good. Enable us to play a tiny part in the building of your kingdom. Fill us with the joy of Easter as we celebrate all that you do for us. So, bless us now and always.

Lord, hear our prayers, the prayers spoken aloud, and the unspoken prayers of our hearts, which we bring now in the Name of Jesus, in whose Name we pray, and in whose words we further pray now:

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.

Offertory

We come to our offertory. As we think of all God's gifts, we offer back what we can.

Let us pray:

Lord, we pray for all work that is done in your name,
and indeed all work that cares for others, offering gifts as we can.
We pray for the work of the Church,
offering to you the gifts by which we support it, money, yes,
but also time and talent, love and service.
Take us, and our gifts of all sorts, to do your work in the world.
Accept the praise we offer; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Holy Communion

Introduction

As we come to Communion, I remind you that it is far more about what God does, than the elements we use. As I remember, I once celebrated Communion with custard creams and coke. Certainly, a biscuit, as easily as a piece of bread, can become a sacrament, a cup of water or tea a remembrance of God's redeeming love.

Invitation

For Holy Communion today, I invite you to lend Christ your table. That was how it was in the days that Jesus lived on this earth. He borrowed the tables of Zacchaeus, of Mary. Martha and Lazarus, of the owner of an upper room, of a couple who lived in Emmaus, and with that last, at their table, he took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to them, and then their eyes were opened. So, in your many kitchens, and living rooms, rest your hands lightly upon these elements which we set aside today to be a sacrament.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Let us ask God's blessing upon them. Let us pray.

Gentle Redeemer,
send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing
upon every table where your child shares elements of Communion,
that this Bread may be broken and gathered in love
and this Cup poured out to give hope to all.
Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you.
Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you.
God of all those who are scattered and broken, you call us to wholeness.
We thank you for the love demonstrated in giving your son,
that we might be united with you.
We thank you that in Christ
you enter into the pain, uncertainty, and fear of our world;
and that your arms are open in loving embrace,
gathering us to you as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wing,
as a shepherd gathers his flock.
We thank you for bread and wine,
symbols and signs for us today,
of your faithfulness to your people through all generations.
Loving God, whatever our elements of communion today,
bless them, and if we are partaking of bread, or something like it,
of wine, or something like it,
or if we are not, bless us all.
Sustain us.
Nourish us with your grace.
In Jesus' Name we ask it. Amen.

The Institution

We remember that Paul the apostle wrote letters to congregations
throughout places we now call Greece, Turkey and Macedonia,
and they were the first "remote" worship resources.

Our digital services have a long heritage.

The Communion words sent to the church at Corinth were these:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,
and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Sharing

Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.
The Body of Christ is the Bread of life. As you eat, remember that.

Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.
We are one in Christ in the cup we share. Let us drink thankfully.

Post-Communion Prayer

Spirit of Christ, you have blessed our tables and our lives.
May the eating of this Bread give us courage to speak faith and act love,
not only in church sanctuaries, but in your precious world,
and may the drinking of this Cup renew our hope.
Wrap your hopeful presence around all whose bodies, spirits and hearts need healing,
and let us become your compassion and safe refuge. Amen

*combines material prepared by the Revd Maren C. Tirabassi (United Church of Christ, USA),
the Revd Simon Woodman (Bloomsbury Baptist Church, London),
with some additions and links and combined in this form by the Revd Paul Whittle.*

Blessing

Be blessed.
Have hope.
Know that despite our failures,
despite our disappointments,
despite our brokenness,
Jesus is risen.
The joy of the Lord be your strength.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
be with each one of you, now and always.
Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Alleluia, Alleluia	234		295	30
All heaven declares		426	293	14
Christ is alive! Let Christians sing	260	416	297	
Christ the Lord is risen today	232	411	298	76
God came in Jesus	237			
I know that my Redeemer lives	278	423	303	2781
I serve a risen Saviour				295
Jesus lives!	239			
Led like a lamb to the slaughter	241			402
Low in the grave he lay			305	453
Now the green blade rises	243	417	306	
Thine be the glory	247	419	313	689

RS – *Rejoice and Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Suggested Opening Music *Come People of the Risen King* by Stuart Townend