

**Christchurch**

**10.30am**

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

**Welcome** to this week's worship, whether you are using this worship sheet or joining in the service at Christchurch. On this Third Sunday of Easter, we consider further appearances of Jesus to the disciples following the resurrection.

We use this service, knowing that we are coming into the presence of God with the Church family. Let us spend a few moments in quiet, as we prepare ourselves for worship. Maybe light a candle, or gaze in wonder at a flower or at what you can see out the window, knowing that God sees you preparing for worship and focusing on him.

### **Call to worship**

After Easter, the disciples began to realise Jesus was present with them whether they could see him or not:

*L: Alleluia Christ is risen...*

**R: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

### **Hymn      Low in the grave he lay**

So now the picture is complete, now the story is fully told. The jigsaw is finished: the trinity of grace -the Cradle, the Cross and the Rising -dovetail together.

The cradle: our God come amongst us, to share the life we lead.

The Cross: our God loving us to death.

The Rising of hope: our God giving us eternity. Our new day rises in resurrection light, the darkness of the Cross ended.

### **Let us pray:**

Great and mighty God, we meet together now and praise you acknowledging your power. The power that created the world: the power that sustains the universe: the power that created us, but above all the power that raised Jesus Christ from death to be our Lord and King.

Loving Jesus, we come now to praise you for your glorious resurrection and your love, your love for us. The love for which you gave up your heavenly glory and came and lived on earth. The love for which You suffered and died. But more, we adore you because death was not the end. In the power of the Father you have conquered death and opened the gateway of eternal life to all who follow you.

Loving Jesus we acknowledge you risen from the dead, as Saviour and Lord

Holy Spirit, as we meet together now, we ask that you will be with us directing our worship, guiding our praise, and enabling us to sense your presence. With your guidance, our service will resound to God's glory, our mouths will declare Jesus' praise and our hearts will acknowledge His kingship.

So, to you Father, Son and Spirit, be honour and glory, might and merit, dominion and power, now and forever: through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,  
**AMEN.**

**Read** Gospel Lesson: Luke 24:33-48

"They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others and saying, "The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!"

The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

While the two were telling them this, suddenly the Lord himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were terrified, thinking that they were seeing a ghost. But he said to them, "Why are you alarmed? Why are these doubts coming up in your minds? "Look at my hands and my feet, and see that it is I myself. Feel me, and you will know, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you can see I have."

He said this and showed them his hands and his feet. They still could not believe, they were so full of joy and wonder; so he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of cooked fish, <sup>43</sup> which he took and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are the very things I told you about while I was still with you: everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms had to come true."

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three days later, and in his name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

### **Prayer, Confession**

Lord God, you made the disciples joyful with the resurrection of Jesus, your son. Forgive us we ask, because, like them, we find the truth of Easter so hard to believe. **(Silence)**

Forgive us that we are so easily downcast, and given to despair: forgive us that, although we claim to live by the resurrection faith, we so often appear to believe that suffering is simply a tragedy and that death is the end. Forgive us that we take so much convincing of the hope that you give to the world.

**(Silence)**

Lord may we in these moments feel the power of the risen Christ. Take away our crippling doubts and fears and through your Holy Spirit bring us to full life in your service; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **Hymn Christ is alive! Let Christians sing**

### **Prayer (Intercessions)**

We have been remembering the life and service of His royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. In our prayers now we will keep in mind the loss that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth is feeling and pray that her faith in the resurrection of Jesus will give her strength and comfort at this time.

After each thought, to the words :

God of Life and Love: please respond: **Raise us to new life with Christ.**

### **Let us Pray**

When hope lies dead in the tomb with Jesus and we cannot see that things can improve for our world, our country, our church, for our loved ones, for ourselves:

God of Life and Love: **Raise us to new life with Christ.**

When joy lies dead in the tomb with Jesus and life seems a dreary, uphill struggle for the needy, the sick, the depressed, for our loved ones, for ourselves:

God of Life and Love: **Raise us to new life with Christ.**

When peace lies dead in the tomb with Jesus and intolerance, conflict and warfare abound between nations, races and religions, between loved ones and within ourselves:

God of Life and Love: **Raise us to new life with Christ.**

When love lies dead in the tomb with Jesus and the world is a harsh, uncaring place for the hungry, the homeless, the needy, for our loved ones, for ourselves:

God of Life and Love: **Raise us to new life with Christ.**

When faith lies dead in the tomb with Jesus and suffering challenges belief and trust in you for the bereaved, the fearful, the doubters, for our loved ones, for ourselves:

God of Life and Love: **Raise us to new life with Christ.**

Eternal God, give us the grace to die with Christ - to put behind us the things that come between you and us, and to offer ourselves wholeheartedly in the service of your love.

God of Life and Love: **Raise us to new life with Christ.**

### **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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours.

Now and forever. **Amen**

### **Hymn      The day of resurrection**

Interestingly, the gospel story today is the end of the tale we call the 'Road to Emmaus'. The Emmaus disciples have rushed back to tell the fearful group of disciples in Jerusalem what they have experienced and learn that Simon has already passed on his own story of meeting the risen Christ. Then, into their midst, stopping the hubbub of conversation, Jesus appears and speaks "Peace be with you. We often note that failure to recognize Jesus is a hallmark of his resurrection appearances, but it is especially acute here. This group has just heard stories of the resurrection by the women, by Peter and by the Emmaus pair but the group fails to make the connection between their own exclamation that "the Lord has risen" a little earlier, with the person now standing in their midst. It seems that it is one thing to accept something on someone else's say-so, and quite another to accept it for yourself— even when the evidence is right in front of you. So they think they are seeing a ghost, and experience fear not joy!

All the followers of Jesus are on a steep spiritual learning curve. They have to come to realise that Jesus really is alive again. Jesus needs to change their "slowness of heart" and fearful misunderstanding into "opened minds" and joyful recognition.

He sets about removing their fears and ensuring their joy. He speaks "peace" to them. It is his familiar greeting telling them, "Don't be afraid, it really is me." Is what he is telling them. He invites them to see and touch, and then to confirm he is not a ghost, eats some fish. Jesus wants his disciples to understand and Luke wants his readers to understand that this really is Jesus

in person, not a ghostly vision.

However, we need to note that despite this emphasis on the physical presence of Jesus, it is clear that the risen Jesus is not quite the same as before. Yes, it is Jesus. He has the flesh (the solidity) and bones (the rigid structure) of a normal human being. He eats and speaks. He has the marks of crucifixion. He is, to borrow from Revelation, "the living one who died", but he is not simply a resuscitated corpse. He is the resurrected Jesus. The "same but not the same" theme is cleverly interwoven into Luke's text. Go back through the Resurrection stories and see.

In the resurrection narratives Jesus is always coming and going, seemingly unconfined by some human limitations. "While I was still with you" used here suggests that although he is present with them, things have changed. And, when we look at v 36, 'Jesus himself stood among them', we can see Luke almost describing the dual nature of Jesus. The term Luke uses for "stands" or "stood" is also the term he used to describe the visitation by a heavenly messenger, the angel "standing" before the virgin Mary. Jesus is both a "normal and yet divine messenger"! His resurrection body is both, human and spiritual. In striking this balance Luke presents Jesus' resurrection in a way that rejects the main theories about the afterlife prevalent in the Hellenistic world at that time and indeed in our own time. Today, this presentation by Luke of Christ's resurrection appearances is both noteworthy and important for us.

But, Jesus (and Luke in his writing) show that the physical evidence of resurrection needs both interpreting and confirming from scripture. Only after 'Jesus has opened their minds to understand the scriptures' (verse 45) can these disciples and others down the years to us today, only then can they and we take news of the salvation that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has bought out into the world.

Interestingly as I prepared this address I spotted something I had not noticed before at this point in the Gospel Story. The Old Testament describes how in times to come the nations and peoples of the world would come to Jerusalem to Worship God in his Temple. However, here the situation is reversed. Before that can happen the disciples must take the message of forgiveness, salvation and love from Jerusalem out to the peoples of the world. Jesus tells the assembled company, "Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins is to be proclaimed in my name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Jesus here makes clear the missionary message 'repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be taken to all nations, by the disciples.

And that my friends is where we are now. We are the next set of witnesses to take that story out to those around us and beyond. And, during the past, topsy-

turvy year, that is what we have been doing in often very different ways to the past. And it seems we have done it quite noticeably. I don't know if you heard what Boris Johnson had to say on Easter Monday. No, I am not a Boris fan but I did hear the message and was both pleased and amazed. Amazed that he said it and pleased that politicians amongst so many others had recognized the service of Christian people and those of other faiths in serving their fellow human beings in the crisis we are passing through.

*What Boris said after the initial 'Happy Easter and mention of Easter Eggs and Bunnies' was, " But let's not lose sight of the fact that this is Christianity's most important festival and, while churches are open, once again, the ongoing Coronavirus restrictions mean that it won't be possible for many Christians to mark Easter in the way that they would like. But if there is one thing that British Christians have shown us this year it is that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, not just today but every day. His teaching and the message of his death and resurrection permeates through every aspect of daily life. That's why I have lost count of the numbers of Church leaders and congregations who have stepped up to support us all in these very challenging times. Millions of Good Samaritans, each of them showing what 'love thy neighbour as thyself really looks like in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. And having done all that during the darkest days of the pandemic, churches across the UK are now helping us light the path out of it by opening their doors as vaccination centres. It is really very moving to see it. This has been a very tough 12 months but as ever, the arrival of Easter brings with it new hope and this year, more than ever it brings the promise of brighter days ahead for us all. So, stay safe, follow the rules and have a very happy Easter."*

Now that is the most ringing endorsement of Christianity by a politician I have heard. And it is not about leaders but about the foot soldiers of our faith, some of whom we know, who have served their fellows in need around them. We have been and are rightly remembering the sterling service given by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh to our country over many years. But the Easter story of Resurrection with its message of forgiveness, hope, love and service has been shown to the world by the ordinary people. We, we, have been part of that message and we go from here to carry on showing the message and telling the story. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Song      Hear the call of the Kingdom**

**Benediction** (Grace said together)

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the blessing of the Holy Spirit be with us evermore. Amen.**