

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry an act of devotion for individual or families
Sunday 4th April 2021 at 10:30 am
Easter Sunday

Opening words

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.
So she came running to the other disciples and said,
“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

Come let us listen to the words of the angel as we worship this Easter Day.

Opening Hymn R&S 285

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,
To spread thro' all the earth abroad the honours of your name.

Jesus! The name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease,
'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life and health and peace

Prayer of approach, confession and thanksgiving

Risen Lord Jesus, we thank you, Risen Lord, we are the Easter people, and Alleluia is our song. We are the Easter people come to worship, released from tombs of pain and doubt and fear and death into the freedom of this new day, and its promise of hope fulfilled.

We are the Easter people, emerging into the brightness of faith, blinking, questioning, wondering, and hoping.

Come to us, into the garden of our lives, and touch all that is barren, and wasted and dried with your healing hand.

We confess that, like Mary and the other disciples, we are prone to self-reliance: our best laid plans to tend to your broken body are thwarted by the new purposes of your resurrection.

We confess that we are prone to despair: when things can't get any worse, we find the tomb empty and the focus of our living is thrown into confusion.

As you call us by our name, we hear, we open our eyes and we respond, with Mary, in worship to you.

Readings



Isaiah 25:6-9 – he will swallow up death for ever

Psalms 118:14-24 – I thank you that you have answered me

Mark 16: 1-8- “Go tell Peter and the disciples that he is going ahead of you...”

1Corinthians 15: 1-11 – but by the grace of God, I am what I am...

Reflection

This Gospel that begins by announcing “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, and ends in fear and silence: “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” – Luke 16:8. The women were commissioned by an angel but they were still confused and frightened. They would no doubt have forgotten what the angel said to them.

After all the preparation and teaching, Jesus has been getting his disciples for what is to come. Three times he has told them that he must undergo great suffering, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. After his Transfiguration, when Jesus came down the mountain, he told Peter, James, and John to tell no one what they had seen until after he had risen from the dead. Peter almost immediately spoke to Jesus and not to say such things and he was severely scolded by Jesus.

Today on Easter Day, where are they now? The women seem to provide some hope—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had come early on this first day of the week to perform one final act of service for Jesus—to anoint his body for burial. There is no body to be anointed, however. Instead, a young man in a white robe, shares with the news that Jesus has been raised, and then commissions them to “go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (16:7).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to die. They struggled to understand that and now he is making his way to Galilee. Why should that make any sense at all? The women who were part of the group of disciples would have heard the same teaching. But now they are commissioned to proclaim the good news that Jesus has been raised and they run away in fear.

The risen Jesus does not appear in Mark. We are left, with the women, in their fear and confusion, until they finally meet up to share the good news. See I am behaving like the Gospel writers and trying to put an end to the story. We have no evidence that they did bump into Peter, so we are left with an unfinished story. Is that a bit like our lives sometimes? Who is waiting to hear the end of the story about *Evergiven* the ship which has blocked the Suez Canal? Who would have thought it would have taken so long to re-float it?

So despite its unsettled, unsatisfying ending of the resurrection story in Mark, it creates anticipation and gives reason to hope. Why? Because the tomb is empty, because death could not hold Jesus down. And because the women have received the message: “Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (16:7).

Mark’s story has given us every reason to believe that what Jesus promises will take place, because his word has already been fulfilled in many important ways. He has died and risen and he will meet his disciples in Galilee, and the good news will be proclaimed. The women must have spoken eventually, after all; otherwise we would not have this story Mark tells.

In conclusion, as we make our way to Galilee, our hope is that God will bring to completion the redemptive, restorative and reconciling work already begun in Jesus Christ, as God has promised.

Song for Reflection R&S 234

*Alleluia, Alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to His name.*

Jesus is Lord of all the earth. He is the King of creation. *Refrain.*

Spread the good news o’er all the earth. Jesus has died and has risen. *Refrain.*

We have been crucified with Christ. Now we shall live forever. *Refrain*

Communion

Today is the day of promise. Today is the day when our hopes find their focus.

Today is the day when your cross stands empty and we see the stone rolled from your tomb.

Today is the day when women lead the way, in fear and confusion,
simply believing, simply hoping.

Today is the day when all creation celebrates the resurrection promises. So come, eat, drink and celebrate, for Christ is risen from the dead.

*(Eat bread then drink wine with thankful hearts as you say:
"Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!")*

Prayers for others

Lord of Resurrection,

We proclaim with joy your reign over human failings, suffering and even death itself.
On the day of your rising you overturned the priorities and agendas of this world
and brought the reality of a new Kingdom

We bring our lives and the life of this world, your creation, under your reign
for we are no longer living for ourselves but our lives are hidden with Christ in God.
Lord of life, when Your Kingdom comes, new life will appear like new flowers in the time of spring
As we proclaim your resurrection, we pray for the new creation, the new world,
which will rise from our current suffering and dying

A world where creation enjoys a Sabbath rest of peace
A world where families have time to love and nurture
A world where we love our neighbours in community
A world where nations are too busy caring to fight one another
A world where we have time to be still and at peace

We pray for those locked in by hurt, and loneliness and grief.
We pray for those locked in by addiction, and hunger, and poverty.
We pray that we, inspired by your Good News this Easter Day, may bring our practical care and help to those who call out, and to those who are silent.

Today we pray for our union and for those who shape the future of our country and our world.
In times of uncertainty make us confident with kindness. In times of frustration, make us gentle with vision.

Help us to be the Easter people bringing light into our world.
God of Resurrection for the Church we pray, that in our work and witness we may be generous in our believing, and joyful in our serving.
Help us to blend tradition and newness, to keep our faith and work a power for good, and a dynamic for reconciliation and renewal.

This Easter Day, this new beginning, this time of lifting up,
lift up our heads and hearts,
lift up our eyes and voices as we raise these prayers to you. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn R&S 147

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son; endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won;
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away, kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.
Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb; lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
let the Church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing; for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting...

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life; life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love: bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above....

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.

Blessing

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

And the blessing of God Almighty,
be among you,
and remain with you,
now and forever more. Amen

