

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry an act of devotion for individual or families**  
**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021 at 10:30 am**

**Opening words**

The risen Christ is here, to give us His Peace, to impart His life, to send us in His grace  
Peace to you - We bless you now in the name of the Lord, Peace to you  
We bless you now in the name of the Prince of Peace - Peace to you

**Opening Hymn R&S 388**

Jesus, stand among us in thy risen pow'r; let this time of worship be a hallowed hour.  
Breathe the Holy Spirit into ev'ry heart; bid the fears and sorrows from each soul depart.  
Thus with quickened footsteps we'll pursue our way, watching for the dawning of eternal day.

**Prayer of approach, confession and thanksgiving**

God of resurrection we come to you giving thanks and praise for this new day and this new life in you. We reflect on the tomb and the high excitement and marvel of Easter Day last week, we humbly approach you and worship you now. As we gather virtually, we have found that this time of prayer and sharing bring about a real act of fellowship. So this morning we come to you in unity as the risen body of Christ.

Death could not contain nor hold down Jesus, so this Sunday, and indeed every moment of every day, we offer you thanks for Christ's risen presence, in our lives. We give you thanks and praise to be able

The disciples did not expect a visit and words of peace and reassurance yet you breathed on them and offered the Holy Spirit. Breathe on us, Jesus and send you Holy Spirit on us  
We can only marvel at all the emotions experienced by those first disciples and offer our thanks for their dedication and faithfulness.

We offer thanks for the faithfulness of all those who passed on that gospel message.  
Forgiving God, today in scripture we were reminded that we have fallen short of your love. Accept our doubts and embrace our questions. So in silence we reflect on our sin and seek your forgiveness.

For the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for the struggles and commitment of the apostles, for those who passed on the faith generation after generation, we offer you our thanks, our deep thanks and praise.

Breathe your Holy Spirit on this time and come and rest with us in our worship. Amen

**Readings**



**John 20, 19-31** - The risen Jesus stands among his disciples

**Psalms 133** – Living in unity brings blessing

**Acts 4, 32-5** – The believers share a new and generous life

**I John 1-2:2** - The Apostles proclaim forgiveness in Jesus

## Reflection

On the evening of the first day of the week all the disciples of Jesus were together... (John 20, 19).

That sounds like a good thing but they were not together in a good way. Their gathering was characterised by fear and doubt. The doors were firmly locked and they were not going anywhere.

Maybe that is a picture of the Church in lockdown? While our gatherings are pleasant and supportive, perhaps we need to keep in mind that this is not where or how we are meant to be in the long run. But change was about to happen for those disciples. Are we ready for a similar change?

The risen Lord Jesus was able to transcend their locked down state - and he is still able to transcend ours. And the mental and emotional doors of our minds during lockdown may be more imprisoning than the physical doors that are closed.

Jesus offered peace through his presence, proof of his risen status (even to the most sceptical, Thomas Didymus) and power as he breathed new life into that tired and dispirited group. The change that was about to unfold was quite remarkable.

Our other readings point to the changes that will characterise a group of people where the love of God and the hope of the risen Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit are alive.

Psalm 133 talks about the unity that characterise those who are together in a living fellowship with God. Such a group are blessed by God, not just with a warm pleasant feeling of well-being (although that is alluded to in verse 1) but also with an anointed power of ministry to one another's needs and the needs of the wider world. The Psalmist declares that such unity is like precious oil pouring down Aaron's beard and onto the collar of his robe (verse 2). This is a picture of the ministry of God's people symbolized by the priesthood led by Aaron and his descendants who were anointed with oil (symbolizing the work of the Holy Spirit).

There is so much that is dividing the world today on lines of class, political affiliation, nationality, wealth, race and religion. Even age, sexuality and gender are becoming sources of differentiation. The world needs, desperately, an example of dynamic, living reconciliation. The Church of the risen Lord is that model.

Our Acts reading also talks of the unity of this new community but as well as power and boldness, there is a spirit of generosity so that no-one is in need. People are so touched by grace that their attitude to all their possessions changes. These are no longer prizes to be hoarded but blessings to be shared.

As a Synod Treasurer, I rather like these verses!. One thing that strikes me is, that while we struggle as congregations in terms of human resources (and sometimes imagination and courage), the one thing that is not lacking are material resource. As a group of congregations we could muster a huge amount of financial power from various sources (including the, as yet, largely untapped source of our own generosity). With such resources we could do so much to empower the lives of the more disadvantaged communities of our City.

Finally, the Apostle John talks about the grace and forgiveness that characterises this new community. Those who have encountered the Word of Life realise that this is a message of grace, of freedom from condemnation, guilt and exclusion.

Jesus himself, in that locked room gives his disciples a remarkable mandate: to hold out the possibility of forgiveness to those to whom he sends them, **or NOT!** (John 20, 23). Jesus is not saying we have the right to determine who deserves forgiveness - but whether they receive and experience that forgiveness is very much dependent on how far we hold it out!! In a world characterised by criticism, condemnation and "cancellation" of those who we deem to have fallen short, do we dare to be different and consider people through the eyes of God's grace?

## **Song for Reflection      R&S 260**

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.

## **Prayers for others**

Risen Lord, you appeared and said, "Peace be with you."

In the world today so many places lack peace –Let us pray for a world in need of peace: peace between warring nations, peace between conflicting political ideologies, and peace between peoples of faith.

Those living in places of turmoil where wars still rage

Those places where lockdowns are in place, people indoors struggling with relationships, a lack of space and freedom applying added pressures.

Those wrestling with emotions because they have not been able to be beside some of their loved ones as they would have liked at significant moments

Those patients, residents and staff, in hospitals and care homes in so many places around the world where staff are stretched, where resources are scarce, where illness either threatens or dominates.

Those suffering the pain of bereavement.

Those people and situations uppermost in our minds which we lift up to you now ....

So many places lack peace – Breathe on these situations. May your peace offer some respite in the midst of today's concerns and may it point to better days to come.

As well as peace you gave the Holy Spirit; God present with us in all we do.

May we be guided by that Spirit, to offer help and convey peace wherever that is possible.

Hear our prayers, through Jesus Christ, our risen Saviour.

All our prayers we bring together in the words of the

**Lord's Prayer....**

## **Hymn        R&S 195**

I danced in the morning when the world was begun I danced in the moon, the stars and the sun  
I danced down from Heaven and I danced on Earth - At Bethlehem I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be I am the Lord of the Dance, said He  
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be And I'll lead you all in the dance, said He.*

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee They would not dance; they would not follow me  
So I danced for the fisherman, for James and John They came with me and the dance went on.

*Dance, then...*

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame They holy people said it was a shame  
So they whipped, they stripped, they hung me high And they left me on the cross to die.

*Dance, then...*

I danced on a Friday, when the sky turned black It's hard to dance with the Devil on your back  
Oh they buried my body, they thought I'd gone But I and the dance still go on.

*Dance, then...*

They cut me down, but I lept on high I am the light that will never, never die  
But I'll live in you if you'll live in me I am the Lord of the Dance, said He.

*Dance, then...*

## **Blessing**

May the God who created you and sustained you to this day,  
be the wind beneath your wings.

May the Son whose life and death and resurrection is the hope of our lives,  
call you into the future he has planned for you.

May the Spirit who gifts you and prays within you,  
be your strength and inspiration for the coming days.

We are richly blessed by God: Creator, Son and Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen