

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry an act of devotion for individual or families
Sunday 18th April 2021 at 10:30 am

Opening words

Come and hear the words of Scripture.
Come and hear the word of life.
Come and be reminded.
Come and be empowered.
Open our eyes to see the ordinary in you.
In Jesus' name, come ...

Opening Hymn R&S 67

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might,
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above,
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life thou givest, to both great and small.
In all life thou livest, the true life of all.
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

Great God of all glory, great God of all light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.
All praise we would render; O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Prayer of approach, confession and thanksgiving

God our Creator, we give you thanks and praise for all creation.
We come together virtually as we reflect on the disciples gathered but fearful when you appeared in their presence.
You offered them peace, so now God our maker, we pray that your peace will rule in our hearts.
Against the noise of the world we cover our ears; to confusing thoughts we close our minds;
Amid the concerns and distress we are experiencing in our lives we close our hearts as it's too painful to bear.

Help us to worship with open hearts and minds that we may have open ears and eyes to see the work that you call us to do, and open hands to reach out to others.
We do believe. God help our unbelief and keep the resurrection alive in us, so that we may leave behind the guilt and press on to realising your mercy and grace is perfected in your love for us.

God, we confess that when distress comes knocking at our door, all that we have learned and should know sometimes goes flying out of the window.
We fail to turn to trusted sources of help. Forgive us for forgetting how to seek you.
We forget your sustaining Word in Scripture, your presence when we turn to you in prayer.
We are sorry for turning in on ourselves, instead of focussing in you.
We come asking for forgiveness.

Friends, believe the Good News of the Gospel: In Jesus Christ you are forgiven!

Thanks be to God

Readings



Luke 24:36-48 - The risen Jesus stands among his disciples and asks for something to eat.

Psalm 4— I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

I John 3:1-7 - See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God

Reflection

In today's Gospel reading, which feels like a repeat of the Easter story. We recount the appearance of Jesus to his disciples. It is almost as if we needed to hear it again as the last time Thomas wasn't there and so we need to hear things from his point of view. There is a clearly a number of themes throughout the reading in that the disciples are locked away, they are frightened and then Jesus appears to them.

They are then even more terrified. Jesus convinces them that he is their teacher and friend and he puts their minds at rest by retelling them the stories in the Scripture. His final act of sharing a meal with them, brings to light who is really is. Perhaps part of their fear and disbelief as to do with the fact that they all ran away when Jesus needed them most and they were terrified of facing him again and having to explain their actions.

If you had run away, what would you say to Jesus now that he was standing here in your presence?

The story which precedes our reading today is the well-known Emmaus Road reading and the joy and excitement of the two disciples who encountered Jesus on the road, they share stories and heard words from scripture. It wasn't until they broke bread together that they realised who their guest was. So they hurried back to Jerusalem (a bit of a walk, about 20 miles) to share the news with the others.

So this was the moment when they were asking each other 'What are they talking about?' They can just about catch their breath but they were explaining that they saw Jesus. It wasn't the witness of the empty tomb, the women telling them that they had met Jesus or the testimony of an out of breath Cleopas and his companion, or even seeing him for themselves that convinced these disciples of the truth that Jesus was alive, but seeing him eat fish!

Jesus continues his explanation by opening to them the scriptures to show that everything they have learned and taught before his crucifixion has led them to this very moment. He could have reprimanded and given them a hard time by questioned them, "How many times do you have to see and hear before you believe?" Interestingly, Luke does not tell us if all of the disciples finally believed. Are there times in our lives today where fear and doubt drive out the presence of Jesus?

Rather Jesus helps them to see the reality of the resurrection by eating with them. Do we need to share a meal with Jesus and hope that we are enlightened not only by his presence but by is love and care for us. Somehow the ordinariness of this action allows the extraordinariness of God to break through and reassures them.

Where is the extraordinariness of God breaking through in the ordinariness of our lives?

Jesus says, 'You are witnesses of these things.' This is both a statement of fact and a commissioning. The disciples who have experienced these things first hand are now given the responsibility to bear witness to what they have seen and heard. Through the Easter season as we have reflected on the life of Christ, we are also called to witness.

The resurrection prompted the disciples think in a new and different way – to reinterpret all that had gone before in the light of this event.

Joy, disbelief and wondering: a bucketful of mixed emotions. The disciples still hadn't got it all sorted. They didn't fully understand what had happened or what it all meant, but nevertheless, Jesus entrusts to them the task of witness. And he goes on to promise the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them.

It is easy in our world today for us to think that we have to have it all sorted, but Jesus uses us just as we are, in certainty and confusion, in joy and despair, and challenges us to bear witness to what God is still doing in our world.

In conclusion, this is where we come into the story. We come, yes ... we come with our doubts, confusions, fears and misunderstandings. We, each week, through worship we encounter the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit brings enlightenment, hopefully, opening our hearts and minds, setting our hearts on fire. Finally, we are asked to go and be witness to this amazing good news.

So if Jesus appeared now what would he ask you for?

Song for Reflection MP 37

As the deer pants for the water. So my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship Thee.

You alone are my strength, my shield. To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire. And I long to worship Thee

You're my friend. And you are my brother, even though you are a King
I love you more than any other, so much more than anything.

You alone are my strength, my shield. To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire. And I long to worship Thee

Prayers for others

As we give thanks for the witness of the first disciples, we pray for our world.
We pray for areas where there is war, conflict and places where there is famine

As we give thanks for the witness of the first disciples we pray for those who have witnessed terrible things, especially for children, who suffer as a result of actions taken by corrupt governments.
We pray for our world, churches and our communities.

We pray for all those scarred and traumatised,
We pray for those witnessing today in difficult circumstances: those for whom it is costly...
We pray that they may find your peace.

As we give thanks for the witness of the first disciples, we pray for the church in the world today.
For places where Christians are persecuted for their faith and where they live in fear.

God you have called us to be witness by what we have seen and heard and experienced.
We lift those who are in our hearts,

All these things we lift up in the name of Jesus
And bring all our prayers together
In the prayer you taught the disciples ... **Our Father....**

Hymn R&S 265

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
Should set his love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
When Beth'lem's manger was his only home,
And that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
As with his peace he graced this place of tears,
Or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
The crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted
And stays our sin and calms our lurking fear
And lifts the burden from the heavy laden;
For still the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here.

Blessing

May we leave this time
With the blessing of God the Father
To witness to Jesus the Son
and be empowered by the Holy Spirit
Today and always

The blessing of the Mighty one
be with you all
And those you love. **Amen**