

Easter Day 2020

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Living God, we come to you on this day of celebration, conscious that there is so much in our lives, at this current time, that is uncertain, so much we cannot predict, so much we neither know nor understand. **Assure us of the victory you have won in Christ.**

Remind us once more through this season that in all the changes and chances of this world you are an unchanging rock, an unfailing deliverer, and an everlasting hope. **Assure us of the victory you have won in Christ.**

Remind us, as we continue to celebrate Easter in the lockdown days ahead, that your love continues through all things, your power is supreme over all things, and your presence is with us in all things. **Assure us of the victory you have won in Christ.**

Give us this day a sense of your greatness, recognition of all you have done, and a confidence in all you shall do. **Assure us of the victory you have won in Christ.**

Living God be among us now we pray, through the risen Christ. Help us to hear his voice, to offer him our service, and to offer you our praise. **Assure us of the victory you have won in Christ.**

We know that our hope is in you and you alone. Help us to accept that, to live in that assurance, and so to follow wherever you might lead us. **Assure us of the victory you have won in Christ, for in his name we ask it. Amen.**

If we have fallen into despair, **Lord, forgive us.**

If we have failed to hope in you, **Lord, forgive us.**

If we have been fearful of death, **Lord, forgive us.**

If we have forgotten the victory of Christ, **Lord, forgive us.**

May the living God raise us from despair, give us victory over sin and set us free in Christ. **Amen.**

Sing or Read 309 StF

- 1 See, what a morning, gloriously bright,
with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem ;
folded the graveclothes, tomb filled with light,
as the angels announce Christ is risen !
See God's salvation plan,
wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
fulfilled in Christ, the Man,
for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead !
- 2 See Mary weeping, 'Where is he laid ?'
as in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb ;
hears a voice speaking, calling her name ;
it's the Master, the Lord raised to life again !
The voice that spans the years,
speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us,
will sound till he appears,



for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead !

- 3 One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty ;
honour and blessing, glory and praise
to the King crowned with power and authority !
And we are raised with him,
death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered ;
and we shall reign with him,
for he lives : Christ is risen from the dead !

Stuart Townend (b. 1963) and Keith Getty (b. 1974)

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All loving and all powerful God, we thank you for this day and all that it means. For the assurance it brings that your love is stronger than anything else in heaven or earth. Even in these times of the Coronaviruses, you are stronger than evil, than all human powers, than all sorrow and suffering, than death itself. Accept our thanks for this day.

Accept our thanks for everything.

We thank you that in our world of so much pain and sorrow you have shown that hope and faith is not in vain.

Your purpose is always at work, giving meaning to our seeking and striving after good and a way forward. We give thanks for all key workers at this time; those on the frontline, many putting their own health at risk. May we, in future, never take them for granted.

Accept our thanks for this day. **Accept our thanks for everything,**

All loving and all powerful God, receive our praise for all you have done in Christ, a mystery before which we stand in awe, a wonder before which we bow down in praise, a truth in which we live and move and have our being. Accept our thanks for this day.

Accept our thanks for everything, in the name of the living and risen Christ! Amen.

Acts 10: 34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Matthew 28: 1-10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Easter reflection.

We, gather, in our homes, this Easter Day, physically separately but united in love and faith, not just with our friends and families, but also with Christians around the world and across time, proclaiming what is perhaps the most ancient creed in Christendom: **Christ is risen!** Of course, usually we proclaim that joyful phrase amidst the decorated church, the gorgeous music, and in the company of those we usually worship alongside, which typically comes more easily. This year however, we celebrate much differently. Nevertheless, even though we normally enjoy the more festive aspects of Easter, flowers, cards, chocolates, singing our favourite Easter hymns, the truth is that these things, by themselves, don't tell the whole story.

Along with praise-filled shouts of "Alleluia," the whole story of Easter also includes shouts of war and hate; of fear and pain; of confusion and misunderstanding. In the wake of the coronavirus and in the shadow of this plague on our streets and our planet, these emotions are familiar to all of us. And although we may lose sight of it here this morning, these emotions also filled the hearts of the faithful on that first Easter morning.

The arrest, trial, torture, and crucifixion of Jesus occupy the largest single incident in any one of the four gospels. This incident has been the most widely depicted of everything in Jesus' life. Every detail of this grisly process seems to have been carefully recorded by the evangelists. The heart-rending details of the final suffering of the Son of God reveal how deep God's empathy is for the pain and sin of the world and how far the divine love will go to redeem them. Evil in so many forms – political, religious, psychological, and spiritual – poured itself out completely in this event. Yet all these forces exhausted themselves without finally exhausting the faith, hope, and love of God in what happened. In a way, the forces of evil, as powerful as they are, were finally put in their place, exposed ultimately as unreal, and finally overcome in resurrection. The resurrection is the place in human history where evil, injustice, and prejudice are transfigured into justice and goodness.

However, the details of the resurrection itself are not recorded in Matthew's account, neither is there an attempt to record them in the other three gospels. What we have are various accounts of the results and fruits of the resurrection, but not any attempt to describe how it happened. This is because no one was present. No one could have anticipated it; the event itself didn't fit into any of the known categories of knowledge or understanding.

What we have is an event without comparison. You can understand something scientifically today only if you can compare it with something else or with some sort of pattern that already exists. With the resurrection this is not possible: we have an utterly unique, mind-blowing,

heart-changing, spirit-restoring mystery of God. The resurrection cannot finally be assessed by human method.

In the end it is very simple: you either choose to have faith, or you don't. But the decision you make about Easter will profoundly affect the way you live and other choices you make for the rest of your life.

A 1965 song by the pop group The Animals declares, *'We gotta get out of this place If it's the last thing we ever do ...there's a better life'*. Jesus broke out of the tomb to release us into a new better life. Do we need to break out of any 'prisons' or 'tombs' that confine us – e.g. circumstances, prejudices, addictions, fears? Many of us may feel that this lockdown, during the Coronavirus emergency, is like an incarceration. Sometime later, Peter told those gathered in Cornelius' home; how he had been freed from ingrained attitudes – attitudes that could have imprisoned the gospel in a cultural isolation. Are there any contemporary, local or personal examples of attitudes or cultural isolations from which you need to be freed? Maybe this time of isolation could give you the chance to reflect on our confinements; confinements of attitudes, outlooks and so on, to work out what our real priorities are.

On that first Easter Day the women had come to tend a corpse. Instead, they were met by the risen Jesus. It was a transformational moment that impacted on the whole course of their lives. Today, the Easter story is well known, and there is no longer that element of shock and surprise. How can we rekindle the sense of wonder, and recapture for ourselves the joy and mystery of the resurrection? In what ways can we let Christ's resurrection be in us?

There are four Gospels, four different accounts of the resurrection. Matthew focuses on the dramatic: the earthquake, the angel, the terror of the guards, women whose fear is displaced by overwhelming joy. Mark's brief, abrupt account highlights the mystery of the event. Luke expands the narrative with the rejection of the women's story until a series of encounters convinces the men of the truth. John develops the account of the women's discovery: the race to the tomb and Mary's meeting with the 'gardener'. Is Matthew's version over the top? Does Mark's seem incomplete? Does the failure to recognise Jesus in Luke and John add or detract from their authenticity? Which of these accounts resonates most for you?

Because the New Testament does not try to explain the mechanics of the Resurrection, neither do we: it cannot be explained. We can only understand, by faith, its grace and recognise it as an amazing miracle of love. We can only understand, by faith, and recognise in its grace an amazing miracle of love

We understand resurrection when we taste a freedom and freshness that lies in the very depths of our lives.

**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, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Sing or Read 313 StF

- 1 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.*
- 2 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 :
- 3 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 :

Edmond Budry (1854–1932)

translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875–1939)

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**May the risen Christ reign in my heart;
may the Comforter inspire and challenge me;
may the God of glory be with me, always. Amen.**

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen