

Dorset South and West Circuit Service for Easter Day. By Tony Boyden

Theme: Resurrection People.

Call to worship

The stone has been rolled away.

The grave clothes are folded.

The tomb is empty.

'This is the day that the Lord has made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it!'

Hymn: See, what a morning, gloriously bright *Stuart Townsend (b 1963) / Keith Getty (b 1974)*

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 in
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!

Prayer of thanksgiving and adoration.

Lord, we come to you with joy that you are risen.

You have renewed our hope and sense of wonder for you have conquered death and turned our sorrow into joy and shown us a love which is way beyond anything we can measure or describe.

So this Easter Day we thank you for this joyful news of the Resurrection, that you have conquered death and given new life to all who believe.

We pray that you help us to hear this news afresh today as though we were those first disciples.

Help us to understand the difference it made to them and their lives

And help us, today and always, to live as Resurrection people and as people who tell good news to those around us. **Amen**

A prayer of confession

We shout our alleluias; yet, within us, there are burdens of guilt and regret; there are words spoken and deeds done that ought not to have been; there are tasks of discipleship left undone; there is love not given, a smile not offered; there is rejection, denial, betrayal. On this Easter Day, we confess our failings and in resurrection life and light seek forgiveness. Risen Lord, hear our prayer.

Assurance of forgiveness

Almighty God, you hear our prayers, you accept our confession and, through your great love for us, you offer us redemption, forgiveness, love and blessings beyond our deserving. Our sins are forgiven. **Amen.**

Readings: Mark 16: 1-8.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But 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. 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.

Sermon: Resurrection people.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead....
1 Corinthians 15: 17-20

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote with blunt honesty that our very faith hangs on that massive 'if'; If not, it lacks meaning and truth.

For if Christ is not risen, death has the last word. All our gloomy fears that after our last breath there is nothing will be realised. There will be no joy in life beyond what we can eke out in the time we are allotted and we will do anything to cling on to life as long as we can.

If Christ is not risen, we will have to assume that those involved in Jesus' death- the traitor Judas, the denying Peter, the hand-washing Pilate, the conniving Caiaphas –will have had the last word. It will be wishful thinking otherwise that sin has been overcome.

If Christ is not risen, the Pharisees and Sadducees were right. Jesus was simply a Jewish man; a blasphemous wild prophet with a healing hand and a big ego. And yet again it will show that idealistic prophets usually come to a brutal end at the hands of ruthless regimes.

If Christ is not risen, two thousand years of church will amount to little more than some stirring music, a lot of kind deeds and some beautiful architecture.

If Christ is not risen we are of all people most to be pitied. It's as bad as that.

But let's slowly turn around like Mary in the garden or run headlong like the women from the tomb; let's sit open-mouthed like the disciples in a locked room, jump from the boat like Peter and Andrew into the lake, be astonished like Thomas in the upper room. Let's dismantle all our ifs, put away our despair, be renewed in faith, hope and love: for indeed Christ is risen. And this simple but titanic discovery means we can see creation in a positive and wonderful light. If Christ is risen our faith takes on a meaning beyond words.

At Easter, God showed that neither sin nor death can finally separate us. If Christ is risen death does not have the last word. Our lives are simply a foretaste of what is to come and that means we are not constantly wanting to accrue earthly possessions and kudos nor desperately seeking ways to overcome the limitations of mortality.

If Christ is risen we know that our sins will be redeemed by forgiveness and healed by reconciliation. At Easter God turned the worst that humanity could do in crucifying Jesus into the best that we could imagine in giving us life in a divine relationship forever. Nothing will prevent God from turning the ugly into something beautiful: evil will not just be defeated, it will be changed into good. How else could the feckless Peter or the persecuting Paul have been transformed into the evangelists they became?

If Christ is risen, and the promises that Jesus made about his dying and rising have come true, we can trust his other promises. We can know he is who he said he was. We can be confident that his is a story with significance for the whole universe. All other knowledge and understanding - whatever its source and its value- pales into insignificance unless it finds meaning in the risen Christ.

And however frail foolish and fallible we might sometimes be as Christ's followers, we are reassured that we can turn to God for forgiveness if we acknowledge our faults.

So when that momentous 'if' was answered at the tomb on the first Easter Day it meant that we could live our lives confident that death was not the end but the gate of heaven, sin could always be turned into grace, and that evil has no lasting power over us. Whether we live or die, God is with us, and will never let us go. With Mary we turn from the place of darkness and despair and destruction and death to know that we can live our lives in the strength, and the hope, and the promise, and the wonder, of that assurance. The stone of despair has been rolled away. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray for

those for whom today is just another day: those who have to work;

those who have not yet encountered the risen Christ; those who do not celebrate his love.

For God gave his Son, to show his love and bring life.

For God gave his Son, to show his love and bring life.

For all who flee their homes in desperation, and travel into an uncertain future.
Strengthen them on their journeys, and keep alive their vision of finding a secure and welcoming home.

For God gave his Son, to show his love and bring life.

For those who grieve today: those recently bereaved; those for whom this is a time of anniversary; those who wait beside a loved one who is dying.

For God gave his Son, to show his love and bring life.

For all in need throughout the world: those without access to clean water;
those with insufficient food; those who cannot access the health care that they need.

For God gave his Son, to show his love and bring life.

Let us pray for each other and for ourselves, that we may have wholeness, peace and hope through the presence in our lives of the risen Lord.

For God gave his Son, to show his love and bring life. Amen.

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, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Hymn: Thine be the glory *Edmond Budry (1854-1932)*

2. 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:

1. 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:

Blessing

May you step out into the day,
into resurrection light.

Feel the joy that new life brings,
accept the peace that it offers,
and share the love that it gives. **Amen**