**EASTER SERVICE 2020 Revd John Walker**

**Day of dynamic difference**

Entering into Easter Day...let us join with Christians far and wide as we say aloud the traditional Easter Affirmation three times...

CHRIST IS RISEN......HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Let’s reflect a moment.....whatever may be getting us down in these strange days of personal isolation or front line risk as a key worker, Easter lifts us up. The same energies that raised Jesus from the dead can stir our spirits so that we are raised with him (Cf: Ephesians 1: 19-20).

Hymn.

Christ the Lord is risen today: Alleluia!

All creation joins to say: Alleluia!

Raise your joys and triumphs high: Alleluia!

Sing, you heavens, Let earth reply: Alleluia!

Love’s redeeming work is done: Alleluia!

Fought the fight, the battle won: Alleluia!

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal: Alleluia!

Christ has burst the gates of hell: Alleluia!

King of Glory! Soul of bliss! Alleluia!

Everlasting life is this: Alleluia!

You to know, your power to prove, Alleluia!

Thus to sing, and thus to love: Alleluia!

*(Charles Wesley)*

Prayer: God of power and truth and love - the climactic events of Easter rivet our attention and change our perceptions:

Death is no longer a closed door but opens onto glory;

The cruel cross becomes a bridge to greater life;

Pain, frustration and injustice do not have the last word.

We are not alone, but in your keeping - here and beyond.

Lift us up by your love this day, free our spirits

That we may rise above isolation and confinement

Into the positive freedom of the people of God

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Lord’s Prayer (say in the version that you enjoy).

Readings: ACTS 10: 34-43

1. Peter speaks to the family and friends of Cornelius

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.

MATTHEW 28: 1-10

1. 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 an 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 death, 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 worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee - there they will see me’.

SERMON

The little word that makes a huge difference.

Acts 10: 39-40. They put him to death.....BUT God raised him from death ...and

caused him to appear.

MOOD SWINGS

Just now when many are struggling with anxiety and low morale because of the Coronavirus pandemic and the near ‘lock in’ causes the possible problem of loneliness, we can all do with an upturn in positive hopefulness. A point comes in the Easter story when terror and fear begin to be replaced by hope with the shock of a sudden turn in events. The turning point, as in this sermon by Peter, comes with the use of the little Greek word ‘kai’ meaning ‘but’ or ‘and’. ‘But God’, ‘And God’ says it all....God is in the story and changes things decisively. The cruel death becomes a point of transition AND there is more to life in the intentions of God. Let us allow ourselves (even though we have hindsight and have heard the story many times to take in this profound surprise.

THE EARTH MOVES

Because we are living through days of historic crisis, it sometimes feels as if the firm ground has shifted beneath our feet. In Matthew’s account of the Resurrection an earthquake is mentioned when the angel appears and we know that this part of the Holy Land has suffered earthquakes. There is a crack in the rock above the garden tomb (which is the same age as the tomb of Jesus ) made by an earthquake in the fourth century. But peace is in the angel’s message and in the following SHALOM of Jesus when he is encountered. A way through death has been pioneered and death defeated.

In his much read book ‘Waiting for the last bus: revelations of life and death’ Richard Holloway picks out two leading virtues of later life that come with experience - gratitude and fortitude. I want to say ‘Yes’ to this insight BUT add a third. My addition is HOPE. We need more than gratitude and grit to keep us going, we need to expand our spiritual lungs with Easter hope! Hope can come from the grittiness of life when we are bold to say ‘It’s been tough BUT God helps the tough (and the floundering) keep going!

REAPPEARANCES TODAY

Jesus is a documented person in history BUT is also alive today. We do not have to look far to catch a glimpse of him working alongside NHS staff, caring with the careers, amid the supportive key workers who are bravely keeping supplies and vital services going. His voice of ‘Peace’ is also heard through friendly telephone calls, Emails and letters as people reach out to one another in alternative ways. It enables the lonely to hear that they are never really alone.

‘Be in the heart of each to whom I speak, in the mouth of each who speaks to me, this day be with and without (around) me’ (a Celtic prayer).

THERE’S MORE!

The and/but of Easter means there is always more of God to be experienced and explored. ..more to life than meets to eye...more to outweigh and offset all gloom and doom. Whatever life does to us we can say ‘ BUT Christ is risen’.

Here is a poem by James Hunt which shows how the balance can shift -

Jenny kissed me when we met

Jumping from the chair she sat in,

Time, you thief, who love to get

Sweets into your list - put that in!

Say I’m weary, say I’m sad

Say that health and wealth have missed me,

Say I’m growing old - BUT add

Jenny missed me.

At this time when we cannot touch....SHALOM (the kiss of Christ)

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

Gracious God,

For all those needing special care at this peak of Coronavirus,

For all those in the NHS, care services and key roles on whom we depend,

For all those in political leadership, in health planning and strategy,

For all those sadly bereaved at this Easter season,

For all those who are lonely and find the hours long

For all members of our families and friends from whom we are separated,

For all members of the church to which we belong

For a world waiting for liberation

GOOD LORD, WE PRAY.

Hymn

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.

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.

(Brian Wren)

Benediction: May we live

Redeemed in love,

Renewed in faith

Restored in strength, and

Refreshed in spirit

In the name of the risen Christ who goes before us. Amen.