

Easter 2020 (virtual circuit service)

(John 20:1-18)

Matthew 28:1-10

Pre-service hymns:

StF 297 – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing!

StF 305 – Low in the grave he lay

StF 311 – The day of resurrection

Christ the Lord is Risen today – StF 298

Thine be the glory – StF 313

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Call to worship: Christ is Risen: **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Christ the Lord is Risen today – StF 298

Prayer – (on sheet)

Matthew 28:1-10

Sermon

Poem: Resurrection by Mary Ann Bernard

Chorus:

“Goodness is stronger than evil

Love is stronger than hate

Light is stronger than darkness

Life is stronger than death.

Victory is ours! Victory is ours!

Through Him who loved us.

Victory is ours! Victory is ours!

Through Him who loved us.”

Prayer – (on sheet)

Lord’s Prayer

Thine be the glory – StF 313

Benediction (on sheet)

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.'
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.'

For over 60 years, I've been to a Sunrise service nearly every Easter morning –
Since my childhood attending my dad's outdoor services in Florida,
I've been to Sunrise services
 in India on the top of a mountain overlooking the plains,
 On the top of another mountain outside Wellington, NA,
 On the icy-cold Barr Beacon overlooking Birmingham,
 On the church tennis courts in SW London,
 And, for the past several years, on the top of Blue Bell Hill...
Two years ago, Easter Sunrise prayers were said overlooking the Vatican in Rome,
Five years ago, when I found myself on a beach in Thailand on Easter,
 My grandson and I had our own improvised Sunrise Service liturgy by the seaside.
But this Sunday, the Sunrise service got cancelled because of 'social distancing'...
 (except if you're part of my family that lives in the US – it's sunrise for them now!)

For 60 years, I've decorated Easter eggs (hen's eggs) and had Easter egg hunts
 With my siblings, our children, our grandchildren...
Last year at Union Street, we blew out dozens of ducks' eggs
 And decorated them in the Russian/Ukrainian style with wax and onion skins...
This year, it's been hard to find enough eggs to decorate at all...

For over six decades, I've tried to have new clothes for Easter –
 A new dress, new shoes, something new and fresh to help me rejoice!
This Easter, I've just changed out of my jeans and cardigan
 To be here in front of the camera with you...

This year, we can't go to the church for the usual Easter Service,
 we can't bring flowers to decorate a cross
 Or lilies to beautify the church...
 We can't have communion...
So, how do we 'do Easter' during a pandemic lock-down?

It occurs to me that the two Mary's in Matthew's version of the Resurrection story
 Had been in a bit of lock-down themselves.
All 'non-essential' work was banned on Sabbaths in any case for good Jewish households,
 And since Jesus had died just before the Sabbath began,
 They'd been biding their time at home for two days –
 Which might have seemed like an eternity in the circumstances –
We probably have all found ourselves forgetting exactly what day it is
 Over the past few weeks...
 When one's routine is upset, it's hard to keep track of where one is ...

The two Marys would also have been dealing with great uncertainty –
 Everything they'd hoped for, depended on,
 had been suddenly and brutally taken away.
I doubt they'd slept much since the gruesome events of Friday!
Sunday morning was their first opportunity to get up – to get out –
 To try to make some sense of things for themselves.
They perhaps wanted to get out before the others were awake –
 Before the police would be asking questions...
There was already fear in the air –

When your leader has been killed,
It's not wise to make your own face too public...
The women went out, perhaps with fear and trembling, to see...

We might think they were brave to go out –
Some of us have been wearing face masks when we venture out...
But perhaps behind the fine mask of 'bravery' of those women long ago,
There were hearts and souls just about to break...
They would have brushed aside the 'bravery' label –
Bravery actually had very little to do with it.
They went out to the place where they hoped to find some solace,
Some remedy for their grief,
Something tangible to help make sense of the disaster.

But then there was an earthquake as well –
And troubling, strange sightings in the place where Jesus' body should have been...
And a strange being – flashing lightning and 'white as snow' --
which could only be described as an 'angel',
Angel – a word which literally means a 'messenger'....
And the message was: "He is not here; for he has been raised"

They heard the first part: Oh my! Not here? What now?!?!? How much more can we take?

Perhaps it took a while to make sense of that: 'He is not here'
It's still something we struggle with today:
He's not here, he's not confined to all the places, the expectations we've had
For where and when and how we will meet Jesus –
Not in the church building where we've met for years and years ...
Not in the Sunrise Service,
Not in the boiled or chocolate eggs
Not in the new clothes
Not in the flowers for the cross

Perhaps the women remembered Jesus had said something about that a few days earlier
As he had walked with his disciples past the temple –
He had said that it would all be destroyed – the whole enormous, fabulous temple –
The one that people came from miles around to see
It would all be destroyed --
But he would build it up again.
It hadn't made sense then – but perhaps it was tugging at their minds now...

"He is not here," the angel said.
It's not to say that he wasn't there previously –
But he's not confined to how he was known in the past
He's not content to just sit and wait for us to get back to memories of him
He has been 'raised'.... from the dead.
From the dead places of the past.
And not just raised – but alive and well
Not waiting for us to get back to him
But waiting for us to catch up with him!

For the angel, the messenger, went on to say that Jesus is 'going ahead of you'
And not just to some unknown place
But to a place that was known to his followers –
'going ahead of you to Galilee'.

Now, Galilee might seem like a rather strange and exotic place to most of us
But to his followers, it meant he was going back home –
Going back to the ordinary life where they had known him before.
Doing the ordinary things that people do in their ordinary lives –
Eating and sleeping and working and resting and interacting with each other
And having babies and marrying and burying their dead...
Except it wouldn't just be 'back to normal', back to the same ol' same ol'...
It would be a resurrected life.

I remember a friend who suffered from depression and anxiety
And finally got the help, the treatment, he needed—
When he came 'home', he was a completely different person!
When he went shopping, he suddenly saw all the 'new things' in the shops...
Things that had, in reality, been there all along,
But before his healing, he couldn't see them...
He came 'home' with armloads full of the 'new' blessings from the shops!
It's like that with the resurrected life: we see and feel God's presence with us
In new and powerful ways even in the midst of our 'Galilee' life.

There are many things about Christianity that I struggle with –
Concepts like transubstantiation and substitutionary atonement,
Like the virgin birth and justification by faith...
But the one thing that holds fast for me is the Resurrection.
On this peculiar Easter Sunday – when nothing really seems the same –
When we can't go out and do the things we've always assumed,
Perhaps this is our time to realise again what Easter – what our Christian faith –
Is really about: Resurrection...

Recognising the places -- in our lives and the life of the world --where God's Spirit is present,
Especially in the midst of difficult and chaotic times:
New life is springing up
Green shoots popping up out of nowhere after the winter cold
New possibilities emerging when everything seemed hopeless before –
(who ever imagined we'd get 200+ joining in for a virtual circuit service!)
A stone rolled away that previously seemed immovable
A cause that seemed lost has prevailed
And justice – that 'public face of love' – has defeated injustice
Right has defeated wrong. Goodness is stronger than evil, life is stronger than death...

Because of Resurrection, the Church as we have known and loved it
Might not be restored back to the way we knew it.
The Church is, of course, called the Body of Christ,
And that can only be resurrected.

So I believe in Resurrection!

Not a resurrection that comes through our righteous efforts, though they can be useful.
Not a resurrection that comes because we deserve it; we don't.
Not a resurrection that comes through our superiority
Of action or thought or strategic planning or theology;
Resurrection that comes because God's Spirit *inspires* us –
Breathes new life into us
Enabling us to persevere in believing in all that is good and right and true.
Believing it enough to lay our lives on the line as well
When everything seems lost.

There *will* be resurrections, time and again,
In the Galilees of our lives:
When there is reconciliation between those estranged.
When there is repentance from each of us for all we've done wrong.
When there is forgiveness for what has gone before
When there is a rebirth of creativity
In the places where apathy had reigned
And the river of hope had run dry.

There will be resurrections in the Galilees of our lives
When the air that we and all God's creatures breath is clean again
When we have set aside our compulsions to move faster, further than we need.
When our global and national economy recognises that we can only move ahead
At a speed that accommodates the pace and needs of the slowest...

There will be resurrections when the caring spirit between neighbours
Overcomes the barriers that meant we never knew each other's name.
When there is freedom for those whom we have been complicit in holding captive
By fear, by mistrust, by anxiety, by poverty, by prejudice;
When enemies can sit down together
And hear and respect each other's pain and hurt
And dreams and aspirations.
When we can share our scars
And the stories of how we've grown through pain
When we can recognise the strength that has come to us through God's loving presence
The strength that the Resurrected Jesus gives us
To endure ... To persevere ... To love and rejoice and celebrate.

I believe in Resurrection
Past hollow chocolate eggs and lily-filled crosses
Past church doors closed because of Corona virus
Past Sunrise services that didn't happen in the places we expected
Past the empty tombs of all we feared and yet held on to.
Because Jesus is alive
And goes ahead of us and with us
Into our individual and collective Galilees.
And the job the Angel gives us is to go and tell the brothers:
"Jesus is alive and well and resurrected – waiting for you in Galilee!"

Easter hymns 2020

StF 297 – Christ is Alive! Let Christians sing!

1. Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.
2. Christ is alive! No longer bound
To distant years in Palestine,
But saving, healing, here and now,
And touching every place and time.
3. In every insult, rift, and war,
Where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
And lives, where even hope has died.
4. Women and men, in age and youth,
Can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
And find the way, the life, the truth,
Revealed in Jesus, freed for all.
5. Christ is alive and comes to bring
Good news to this and every age,
Till earth and sky and ocean ring
With joy, with justice, love, and praise.

■ Brian Wren

StF 298 – Christ the Lord is risen today

1. 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!*
2. 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!*
3. Lives again our glorious King; *Alleluia!*
Where, O death, is now your sting? *Alleluia!*
Once he died our souls to save; *Alleluia!*
Where's your victory, boasting grave? *Alleluia!*
4. Soar we now where Christ has led, *Alleluia!*
Following our exalted Head; *Alleluia!*
Made like him, like him we rise; *Alleluia!*
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: *Alleluia!*
5. 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

StF 305 – Low in the grave he lay

1. Low in the grave he lay,
Jesus, my Saviour,
Waiting the coming day,
Jesus my Lord:
*Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign:
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*
2. Vainly they watch his bed,
Jesus, my Saviour,
Vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus, my Lord:
*Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign:
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*
3. Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord:
*Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign:
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*

■ Robert Lowry

StF 311 – The day of Resurrection

1. The day of resurrection,
Earth, tell it out abroad!
The Passover of gladness,
The Passover of God!
From death to life eternal,
From earth unto the sky,
Our Christ has brought us over
With hymns of victory.
2. Our hearts be pure from evil,
That we may see aright
The Lord in rays eternal
Of resurrection light;
And, listening to his accents,
may hear, so calm and plain,
His own 'All hail!' and, hearing,
May raise the victor strain.
3. Now let the heavens be joyful,
Let earth her song begin,
The round world keep high triumph,
And all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen
Their notes of gladness blend,
For Christ the Lord is risen,
Our joy that has no end.
■ St John of Damascus

StF 313 – Thine be the glory

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 has lost its sting.
*Thine be the glory,
Risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory
Thou o'er death hast won.*

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:
*Thine be the glory,
Risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory
Thou o'er death hast won.*
■ Edmond Budry