

April 5 2026 -- Easter Sunday online

Pre-service music

Low in the Grave He Lay

Now the Green Blade Riseth (Tune: Noel Nouvellet - 4vv) [with lyrics for congregations]
"Christ Has Risen" HOLY MANNA (COVID version)

== Order of Service ==

Call to worship – John 20:1-10 **GMT20260315-091259 start at .10 to 5.42**

Christ the Lord is Risen Today | Reawaken Hymns | Official Lyric Video (StF 298)

Reflection on Bluebell Hill and what we can ‘see’ **GMT20260315-091259 – 5.57 to 19.14**
Colossians 3: 1-4

Now the Green Blade Riseth (Tune: Noel Nouvellet - 4vv) [with lyrics for congregations] StF
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John 20:1-18 – **GMT20260315-134041 start at .14 to 4.03**

Reflection -- **GMT20260315-091259—19.24 to 34.15**
1 Corinthians 13

"Christ Has Risen" HOLY MANNA (COVID version)

Intercessions -- **GMT20260315-091259**

Randall Thompson's Alleluia, from 30 Years: Jerry Blackstone and Friends - YouTube

John 20: 1-10 --The Resurrection of Jesus

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still **dark**,
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb
and **saw** that the stone had been removed from the tomb.
So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved,
and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,
and we do not know where they have laid him.’

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb.
The two were running together,
but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there,
but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.
He saw the linen wrappings lying there,
and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head,
not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ...

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in,
and he saw and believed;
for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.
Then the disciples returned to their homes.

It was dark – could she see?

And what she saw... what did it mean?

*And even when we’re eager to get there first, and we think we see,
we’re still not sure...*

Dare we enter in?

Do we wait for another to go in first?

Dare we believe that things are not as they look

Or how they seem?

What is it to ‘believe’?

Is it to lay aside what we think we see?

Is it to trust beyond what we know?

How do we go back home

When we’ve seen what we’ve seen?

These are some of the thoughts that come to me as I read this Resurrection Passage this year

Over many years, I, too, have had many questions about the resurrection story –

What does it mean? What are we affirming?

Perhaps that’s why I especially enjoy going to the Easter Sunrise Service:

Something about the early morning darkness

Allows me to inhabit those questions, that in-between time

Sandwiched between knowing and not-knowing...

Time to ponder, time to wonder, time to consider...

Not only ‘what does it mean?’ but ‘what does it mean for me?’

By the time you are viewing this online service,

The Sunrise Service will already have taken place.
This service will first be broadcast at the time of usual Easter Day Sunday service –
And those services usually start with a rousing singing of
Christ the Lord is Risen Today!
I'm going to honour that tradition now by playing that hymn *for us to join with* –
And that, too, is part of my Easter experience:
Like the Nicene Creed, in the Christian context, 'belief' is personal,
But it's also communal – it's what we do together.
And sometimes I need to hear my community reminding me of what we believe.
That assures me that it's OK to have my questions and my wondering,
Indeed, my questions are important
Because they enable me – and us all? – to probe deeper
And subsequently perhaps to understand better.

The version of *Christ the Lord is Risen Today!* that I've chosen today
Comes with the triumphant words
Set against a darker background.
It reminds me of the Sunrise Service – and gives me space
Both to ponder and to affirm.

Reflection on Bluebell Hill and what we can 'see'

Christ the Lord is Risen Today: Alleluia!

As I said earlier, I chose this version of Christ the Lord is Risen Today
Because of the turbulent, almost desolate background –
So many of our Easter hymns are portrayed in almost saccharine images
Like all we can really grasp of goodness is neon and glitz and bling
Like all triumph needs to be shock and awe...
When in fact, God comes to us most powerfully
In times of darkness and confusion.

Indeed, I also chose this version because it reminds me a bit of Bluebell Hill,
Where several from around the circuit will have joined together this morning
For a Sunrise Service.

I have fond memories of gathering there many years
To welcome in the Risen Son with friends and family...
It's a lovely spot on a rocky outcrop on the hillside between Maidstone and Chatham...
As the sun begins to emerge, one can see for miles around...
I remember the joy of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with others
As we shared communion and song and scripture and prayer
In that wide outdoor space.
I remember some Sunrise Services which were quite a challenge –
When the wind and rain threatened to push us off our feet
And bash us against the mountain side.

I can remember going to Sunrise Services since I was a small child.
Momma would wrap me and my siblings up in robes and blankets over our pajamas
And take us to wherever Daddy was leading the service that year.
I remember how Daddy would always be dressed in his white Easter suit
And he would release doves at the end of the service from their cage --
And the doves (homing pigeons, really) would circle above us
As they gathered their bearings
And then whisk themselves away –
Across the world! Daddy would say – spreading the Word
That Jesus is alive!
Most likely, the homing pigeons were heading back home
But, as we've heard from our earlier reading,
That, too, is scriptural –
Because those who first witnessed the resurrection
Went back home to figure it all out...

I remember Sunrise Services in S India
when we gathered as a community on the side of the mountain overlooking the plains
and watching the sun rise in its splendour below...
A Sunrise Service atop another mountain in Wellington, New Zealand...
Still another atop the Barr Beacon in Birmingham –
Where the icy wind from Siberia seemed to race across the expanse of SE England
To deposit its full force upon us:
frozen lips, frozen communion elements.

The places we gather as a community, like the first disciples, to go and see for ourselves
And to remind ourselves that He is Risen – He is Risen, indeed!
And to shout Alleluia!

Back to Bluebell Hill for a moment: there are stories about Bluebell Hill
that aren't so jubilant. Two that I know of involve tragic accidents.
Perhaps the best known took place in March of 1986 – 40 years ago last month –
When a small plane crashed into the side of the mountain at that spot,
Killing all those travelling...
Apparently, the pilot hadn't been wearing his glasses,
So he couldn't see that he was heading into the cliff face!
How often do we assume we can do things on 'auto pilot'
Without taking care to prepare ourselves properly for the task at hand?
Another incident took place on a dark night in November 1965,
when a young woman was hit by a car driving through the fog
On a narrow country lane near Bluebell Hill.
The story goes that she and two other young women died that night
But continued to haunt the area for many years –
Ghosts still looking for life when their own mortality had been cut short.

Bluebell Hill isn't the best location for viewing the rising sun
(because it faces the other direction)
But it is a good place for reflecting on what we can't see in the shadows...
Indeed, there are versions of the Resurrection story in our scriptures
Which speak of Jesus' appearance as that of a ghost –
Indeed, some have supposed that one of the reasons Jesus wasn't immediately recognised
After his resurrection is that he might have been a ghost...
A being that somehow exists in that never-never land between life and death.

Most of the Gospel accounts tell us that those who saw fled in terror....

And yet, our Gospels also affirm that it wasn't a case of ghosts:
Luke's gospel speaks of the angels asking the women who'd come to the tomb:
"Why do you look for the living among the dead?...
He is not here. He is risen."
There is life, there is reality here, even in the midst of mist and confusion...

Many of you will be aware that I'm currently living through a period
Where my 'reality' is also lived in the midst of mist and confusion.
Over the past five months, I've been going through various treatments for cancer
Which I had no idea would happen to me before that!

Over the past month or so, the biggest visual change has been losing my hair...
Initially the doctors had said I wouldn't lose my hair with the chemotherapy
Because I chose to wear a 'cold cap' during the infusions –
Kinda like a bicycle helmet crammed full of refrigeration tubes!
VERY cold, very uncomfortable – but it gave me some hope...
Though that hope was not realised, and indeed I began to lose my hair after a few weeks.

We're often challenged to 'give up something for Lent' –

So, I suppose, what I gave up was my hair.
And in the context of the Easter story, that has made me more aware
Of what it is to be recognised...
I have chosen not to go with a wig –
But to use the wide collection of headscarves that have come my way over the years.
There is indeed a certain luxury that comes from wrapping one's head in silk each morning!
And then I started posting photos on facebook each day –
And that has become a wonderful way of reconnecting with friends and family
Far and wide...
I wondered initially: will they still recognise me?
The facial recognition on my phone doesn't work on me these days...
And sometimes the facial recognition apps at the airport don't...
But nobody has said, "I don't recognise you!"
Indeed, many have commented that they see me more clearly now.
When we give up what we thought was making us attractive
Something else can be discovered.

And not just 'me': *My headscarves – which have languished in a drawer for many year,
Now have new life, because I have lost my hair...
I have recognised their use and beauty in a new way
Because I am no longer confined to how it's always been...*

Sometimes that ability to see new life comes only because of loss –
We become so reliant on what we think we know – on how things have always been.
As I said before, I had no warning some six months ago that my life would suddenly change
With a cancer diagnosis.
But suddenly there were new circumstances to negotiate –
New ways of thinking through
New ways of being
New ways of sleeping and eating and working and getting dressed in the morning.

Was I still recognisable?
What was the essence of *me*?
Without a womb?
Without hair?
Without a regular schedule?
Without being able to go and come as I please?
Some days without patience...

What I discovered was the me that God had created and blessed and sustained all along.
And other folks began to tell me they were also recognising something new within me.

One of the lectionary readings for today comes from Colossians 3: 1-4,
And it's called '**The New Life in Christ**'
So if you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,
for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ who is your life is revealed,
then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

*It's not about earthly things, what we think we can see
It's about God's glory shining through us...*

I think about Mary, blinded by her tears, who couldn't really see what was in front of her –
Because she was trapped in the misery of losing what she knew and loved...
I think about those who were walking to Emmaus a few days later: immersed in their sadness,
Not grasping that Jesus might be with them still, but in another way.

Easter is about being able to see through the tears, through the years,
Through the weariness of the daily slog –
And into the future of hope.
Easter is about a final victory of good over evil,
But we are still caught up in the 'at hand' and 'not yet'...
Being an Easter People means continuing to believe in goodness,
In hope, in love,
When so much around us seems bewildering.

[Now the Green Blade Riseth]

We return now to John's Gospel to consider the rest of the Resurrection Story:

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-28)

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

I'm a bit weepy these days, too –

Things just seem so strange, so much to take in...

But sometimes when we weep, we can actually see reality more clearly

Not under the fog of trying to make things 'normal'

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;

She took a chance on looking further

and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying,

one at the head and the other at the feet.

That's what she saw... what did she think of seeing angels?

They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'

What did she think of angels TALKING to her?

She said to them, *(she responds!)*

'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'

I'm confused...

When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, *seeing...*

but she did not know that it was Jesus. *Not knowing...*

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'

(How might he have said this? Sternly? Scolding? Lovingly?)

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him,

'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

She reacts defensively... can't quite 'see' yet

Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).

When Jesus calls us by name – lets us know that he knows who we are!

And then we can know him as well...

Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.

Don’t hang on to what you think you see... there are deeper things to understand

But go to my brothers and say to them, ***(the first Christian preacher was a woman!)***

“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ’

What would that mean to her or them?

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’;

She tells them what she’s seen

and she told them that he had said these things to her.

and what she’s heard from him.

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Having been a preacher for several decades now, I wonder what Mary told the brothers...
Interesting that in this version, she's not told to tell the brother that Jesus is alive
Only that he is going to be with God – the God to whom he is connected
As deeply as a son is to a father.
And that the connection of father/son, parent/child is potentially the same
For each of us... Our Father, Our God, Our Loving Parent
Flesh like our flesh, Spirit that unites us.

Each Saturday afternoon, my four siblings and I join in for a facetime chat.
We've done that each week since the start of COVID
And it's become a very special time for each of us.
Originally we started the calls because our parents were both very ill,
And we needed to keep each other up-to-date on what was happening.
Three of my siblings live in Florida, one is in Virginia, and I am in England...
Now that both our parents have passed on,
We've kept up our calls.
We share with each other what's going on in our lives...
We share memories of growing up together
Sometimes we check out with each other the versions of what we remember...
And sometimes we find out things we hadn't realised at the time...
We share the joys and woes of grown children and grandchildren
And swap stories of what's worked and not worked...
Sometimes we call our Saturday afternoon sessions our Organ Recital...
As we're each getting to the age
when various parts of our bodies are wearing out –
eyes, ankles and knees, bladders, wombs.
We've realised this sharing of knowledge is an important part
of understanding ourselves
One's siblings are the closest genetic copies of ourselves,
So we listen carefully for echoes of what's going on in their bodies.
It happens with one's parents and children as well:
Over recent weeks, I've heard myself saying so many of the things my mother used to say:
I can't handle a full dosage of that medication – can you give me a half dose?
This eczema is driving me crazy!

What does this have to do with Jesus and Mary?
“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”
We are all connected. We are all one body.
Our bodies connect us all with each other – and with God
Because, that in Jesus, God took on our own bodies –
God incarnate, fully incorporated – embodied within a human body.
But like, Jesus, our earthly bodies is not all that we are.
Each of us is more than the hair and teeth – which will fall out!
We are more than skin or wrinkles, more than eye colour or size or shape.
We are those things, but we are also more.
We are God's Beloved – within and beyond these bodies.
And God cares for us as a loving parent cares for a child.
Deeply, passionately, personally.
Yes, sometimes human parents get it wrong.
But God loves us as we need to be loved.

God is Love. And love is eternal.

When Jesus ‘ascends’ to the Father, he also tells us that he will always be with us,
That wherever we are, God will be there, too.
Wherever God goes, we are welcome as well.

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There is another well-known scripture that comes to mind about God and love and seeing...

1 Corinthians 13

¹If I *speaks* in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,
and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,
but do not have love, I am nothing.

³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,
but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude.

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end;

as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

⁹**For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;**

¹⁰**but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.**

¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child;
when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

¹²**For now we see in a mirror, dimly,* but then we will see face to face.**

Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³**And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.**

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The first part of this reminds us that the speaking/the telling is important,
but the doing is even more important.

We live in troubling, confusing times:

How do we have the eyes to see and tell of God in our midst
when everything around us is confusing?

Perhaps it is precisely in practicing those three traits that Paul holds up:

Faith, hope, and love.

Faith – that we trust in what we know is good and right and true.

“I have faith in you,” we say to a friend
who is faltering to do what needs to be done.

God says to each of us: “I have faith in you” when we falter

Because God knows how God made each of us –

From goodness for goodness...

If only we can set aside the evil

that so easily blinds our sight from the reality of Good.

Dare we say to God as well: "I have faith in you... that God can and will do

What is best for each of us ...

And that God will continue with each of us

Especially when the times are difficult.

Jesus has been through the worst and still triumphed!

That is the essence of Easter for me.

Hope – that we do not succumb when everything around seems dark and confusing.

Hope is not just wishing for good

It is working towards goodness in the dark times

Knowing that ultimately Goodness will prevail –

That's again what we celebrate with Jesus' resurrection over the dead!

Goodness will prevail in the end, and if it's not good now, it's not the end.

Love – the essence of Goodness.

When we continually surround ourselves with seeking ways to share God's love,

Then we will indeed find that love for ourselves.

Over recent weeks, my body has been repeatedly filled full of medicines and chemicals...

Indeed, that is what 'chemotherapy' is all about –

Using the best medical chemicals our species has discovered

To eradicate an evil lurking inside the vessel that is my earthly body.

According to the doctors, I am healing.

But there is another therapy as well: and that is what I'm calling the 'love therapy'

Which I am experiencing daily.

Huge doses that have come abundantly from friends and family across the world –

It's almost as if the love had been there all along

But was being blocked somehow

Like I hadn't opened myself to be able to receive it.

And now, when I have 'lost' the things that were making me secure in myself,

I am free to receive the things that others were so eager to give me from themselves.

It's no secret then, that Jesus showed us that love flows most freely

When we are willing to give ourselves up

Willing to lose what we could never keep

In order to find what we can never lose.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Say it three times!!!!