

Service of the Word

Easter 3

26 April 2020

Gathering and Greeting

Good Morning and welcome to our service. This is the sixth week we have been unable to meet inside St Paul's and I am sure many of you like me are missing our fellowship, singing and coffee. For now these podcast services are our way of worshipping together, sharing our hopes and fears in prayer. Our technology is moving on, but slowly so this week Jeremy is reading the Psalm for us. I hope in future weeks we can add more familiar voices to the readings and the prayers. For today though let us breathe in deeply, gather our thoughts and bring ourselves into the presence of God.

We are gathered together as the family of God
to offer praise and thanksgiving
to ask forgiveness of our sins
to hear and receive God's holy Word
to pray for the needs of the world
and to seek God's grace
that through Jesus Christ our Lord
and in the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to God's service.

Penitence and Forgiveness

Return to the Lord, who will have mercy:
to our God, who will richly pardon. *(Isaiah 55.7)*

A time of silence is kept,

Penitential Psalm

**I confess my iniquity:
and am sorry for my sin.**

**In you, O Lord, have I fixed my hope:
You will answer me, O Lord my God.**

**O Lord, do not forsake me:
be not far from me, O my God.**

**Make haste to help me:
O Lord of my salvation.** (From *Psalms* 38)

May the Lord forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are
and direct what we shall be,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*SEC Daily Prayer* 1988)

Praise

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Rejoice, then, even in your distress.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

He called us from our darkness into the light of this day.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Collect of the Day

Let us pray,

Lord God, who, in the death and resurrection of your Son,
have raised up this fallen world:
may we and all your people,
rejoice in your eternal presence;
through Jesus Christ, Our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end. Amen

Our first reading is Psalm 116, read by Jeremy

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.
Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.

The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over me;
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.

Then I called on the name of the Lord:
“Lord, save me!”
The Lord is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.

The Lord protects the unwary;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
Return to your rest, my soul,
for the Lord has been good to you.

For you, Lord, have delivered me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.

I trusted in the Lord when I said,
“I am greatly afflicted”;
in my alarm I said,
“Everyone is a liar.”

What shall I return to the Lord
for all his goodness to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his faithful servants.

Truly I am your servant, Lord;
I serve you just as my mother did;
you have freed me from my chains.
I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
and call on the name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord

in the presence of all his people,
in the courts of the house of the Lord—
in your midst, Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord.

***Our second reading is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24,
beginning at verse 13***

That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

He asked, “What’s this you’re discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?”

He said, “What has happened?”

They said, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn’t find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn’t see Jesus.”

Then he said to them, “So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don’t you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?” Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: “Stay and have supper with us. It’s nearly evening; the day is done.” So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

Back and forth they talked. “Didn’t we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?”

They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: "It's really happened! The Master has been raised up—Simon saw him!" Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

Reflection

This is one of my favourite gospel stories. The two disciples, tradition has it one was a woman, two disciples are joined on the road by a mysterious stranger. Someone they should know but don't immediately recognise. The stranger, naturally enough, asks the travellers what they are talking about. He must have noticed from their demeanour that they were upset; so the topic was serious, painful even. What reply does he get - this friendly, inquisitive, mysterious stranger?

He gets all the rubble of their broken dreams poured out at his feet. It is all there; the pain, the disappointment, the grief and the anger that things could have gone so badly wrong! Most of all the gentle stranger receives their sense of hopelessness. The feeling that they have lost everything they ever dreamed of engulfs these two travellers as they walk along the road. The gentle, friendly stranger is allowed to share their walk. He is also allowed to share their feelings.

What does he do - this gentle, mysterious stranger? He takes the rubble of their broken dreams and begins to show them how to put it back together. He talks about love; about God's plan revealed through time in the Scriptures. The mysterious stranger explains how it all had to fall apart in order to be made whole again. The stranger takes the fallen rubble of their broken dreams and helps them to rebuild those dreams within God's love. The rubble is not magically whisked away - the pain and hopelessness is not trivialised. The stranger accepts all this and more. He accepts the rubble just as it is - this is his building material. Neither does the stranger do all the building himself. He points out the plan, the blueprint in the Scriptures.

The stranger helps the two travellers to understand that the rubble is the building material, the Scriptures are the blueprint and the love of God is what holds it all together.

When they arrive at their destination the two travellers invite the stranger, no longer mysterious but a friend, to stay with them for a meal. This is their gesture of friendship - their thank you for all that he has done for them. Little do they realise that they have only received part of the gift the stranger has to offer.

Showing the way to rebuild the rubble of their broken dreams is only part of the gift. If he only did that then things would still be the same but they are no longer the same. The two travellers don't realise it yet but the whole context for their dreams has changed. The world is not longer the same as it was when those dreams collapsed into rubble when their Rabbi was brutally crucified. There is a new order now a new resurrected context in which to build and rebuild unimaginable dreams.

The final gift the stranger gives comes through another ordinary activity; like the walking and talking. This gift comes in the sharing of a meal, the breaking of bread together in friendship. The stranger, mysterious yet gentle, takes bread as is the Jewish custom at the beginning of a meal; blesses the bread and breaks it to share with all those at the table. In this act he gives them the gifts of joy, hope and celebration.

This is the point where the stranger is recognised - no stranger at all but Jesus himself - risen from the dead: alive! This is the new context - the resurrection:

- a love, God's love, so powerful that it overcomes death
- a love, God's love, so powerful that it rebuilds broken dreams
- a love, God's love, so powerful that it makes broken dreams new and whole - gifts of joy, hope and celebration

Just now we have a lot in common with those two travellers. We are sitting in the rubble of many, many broken dreams. We have watched our familiar, normal world fall apart on television screens, in newspapers and among our own family and friends. We watched as our familiar and comforting ways of worship in church disappeared overnight, six weeks ago. We sit and will

continue to sit in the rubble of broken dreams, dreams destroyed by a virus, dreams destroyed by a pandemic. We still have the scriptures which we need to go back to to look for our blueprint for rebuilding the rubble. Psalm 116 is both a lament and a song of hope. The Road to Emmaus story is both despair and hope. Just now we too need to understand that the rubble is the building material, the Scriptures are the blueprint and the love of God is what holds it all together.

Affirmation of Faith

Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus:*
the divine nature was his from the first:
Yet he did not grasp at equality with God;*
he emptied himself and became like a slave.
Taking the nature of man
he was revealed in human form;*
he humbled himself and became obedient
even to death, death on a cross.
Therefore God has raised him on high,*
and has given him a name above every other name;
So that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,*
in heaven, on earth, and in the depths;
And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord;*
to the glory of God the Father. (from *Philippians 2*)

Intercessions

Let us pray,

Blessed are you, God and Father of us all, giver of life eternal.
By the love of your son you have triumphed over hatred.
Light has conquered darkness
and life has overcome death.
You have opened for us the gate of eternal life.
Blessed are you, now and for ever.

Lord, we are Easter people:
let Alleluia be our song

We give you thanks and praise for the resurrection of your Son, Jesus and for his appearances to those he loved.

We rejoice with the whole Church in the joy of the risen Lord.

Grant to us your church in this time and this place the strength to bring peace and hope into our troubled world.

Lord, we are Easter people:

let Alleluia be our song

Lord, we seek your peace:

peace for our world ravaged by this pandemic,

peace for our world torn apart by war,

peace for our world suffering natural disaster,

peace for our nations, our leaders, as they begin the task of rebuilding our world, your world.

Lord, we are Easter people:

let Alleluia be our song

As you appeared to the disciples in the upper room, on the road to Emmaus, come enter our homes;

come enter our fear and darkness;

come enter into our enclosed lives and our fear of venturing out again.

Come with the glorious freedom you offer to the children of God.

Lord, we are Easter people:

let Alleluia be our song

We come with all who weep by the gravesides,

all who mourn the loss of a loved one,

all who feel lonely or deserted.

May all who mourn find new hope and joy in you.

We remember all who are ill, especially those with Covid 19, and all those who care for them.

We think of those who have a heavy weight on their hearts and minds and tears in their eyes.

We ask that each of them and all of us may know the hope of life in the light of the Risen Christ.

Lord, we are Easter people:
let Alleluia be our song

**Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who
trespass against us.
And lead us not into
temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Responsory

This is the day that the Lord has made; *
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day that the Lord has made; *
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.
This is the day that the Lord has made.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
This is the day that the Lord has made; *

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Prayer

**Almighty God,
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:
may it be a lantern to our feet,
a light upon our paths,
and a strength to our lives.**

**Take us and use us to love and serve all people
in the power of the Holy Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Common Worship*)**

Blessing

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life, the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and all those for whom we have a care; this day and evermore.
Amen