

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – Easter Day 2020, 12 April

Opening Responses

The Lord is risen! Alleluia!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Father, this is the day that you have made, a day for us to rejoice in.

In other years, we might be thinking about the ‘sacrifices’ that we have made through Lent. We might have given up chocolate, or alcohol, or puddings ... and be looking forward to enjoying them again. But this year during Lent we have given up so much more, things that have hurt us, far more. We have given up hugs for those of our family who no longer live with us; we have given up inviting in our friends to share food at our table; we have given up freedom of movement.

And yet, and yet, we have arrived at Easter Day, and we remember once again that after the ultimate sacrifice, that of your human life, all things are made new. We praise you and give you our thanks that you died for us so that we could be free. We rejoice in the world you made for us, in all its Spring loveliness, and we celebrate that you are with us in the bad times and the good.

We look beyond suffering and pain and we believe, with all your people, that you are Lord and that all things will be well.

Amen

Whatever the circumstances and wherever you are listening, a very Happy Easter from the podcast team! We open this Easter edition with a traditional Easter hymn: Christ the Lord is Risen today, taken from a recording by the St Michael’s Singers with substantial orchestral accompaniment!

Hymn*: Christ the Lord is risen today!

Christ, the Lord, is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens; thou 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 hath burst the gates of hell, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

King of glory, Soul of bliss, Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
Thee to know, Thy power to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing and thus to love, Alleluia!

(Charles Wesley)

Reading† John 20 1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.'

¹⁴ At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

¹⁷ Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Comment

I illustrated this podcast on the website with a picture by Alexander Andreyevich Ivanov, (you'll not be surprised to hear) a Russian artist active in the 1830s, showing his interpretation of the encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden on that first Easter morning.

It is hard to find a credible illustration that leaves one clear as to how Mary can have failed to recognise Jesus. Some medieval illustrations show Jesus carrying a spade to explain the mistake. Some are so reluctant to show Christ other than in his glory that they show him in dazzling white, sometimes carrying an elongated staff-cum-cross with a banner and

a flag with a red cross, uncannily as if he was an England football supporter.



To me the answer is clear; Mary would have been so upset, so mystified, so stressed and so confused by the empty tomb that she wouldn't have recognised her own mother if she had turned up that morning.

But the voice. That did it. However Jesus changed he was speaking to her in the same familiar way. With recognition came belief. And with belief came the next challenge. Telling other people. We shall no doubt see again in further scripture describing the post-resurrection experiences of Jesus how hard it was to overcome the doubts and disbelief that such an amazing thing could be true. But once you do believe, everything else falls into place.

The disciples could look back (as we can) on the earthly life and the travelling teaching ministry of Jesus and see everything in the light of the realisation of who he was. He could have said, 'I told you so', but instead he began from where they now were.

They did it. They founded the Church. Scared and grieving, feeling battered by circumstances and cut off from friendly support was not a great place to start. That's where many of us are this week.

But Christ makes everything new, and he is always able to inspire a fresh start if we resolve to make one. Let's be ready to respond when he asks us to take his Church forward, strengthened by a fresh knowledge of him this Easter.

Here is a song placed in the Old Testament at the point when the pursuing armies of Pharaoh have been defeated – it is a traditional Christian Easter liturgical response to the triumph of God, even over death itself:

Canticle "Sing to the Lord" (based on words from Exodus 15)

I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.

The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.

Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power. Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

Who is like you, O LORD? - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed.

In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling. Amen

Song: *Behold I make all things new* (from *Come all you people*, Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community)

Behold, behold

I make all things new, beginning with you and starting from today.

Behold, behold

I make all things new; my promise is true for I am Christ the Way.

Intercessions for Easter

Let us pray...

Father, on Easter Day we pray for Christians the world over, unable to go to our places of worship and to meet together as usual. We ask for your strength to be the church without walls, and your inspiration to show us how to connect with one another.

We pray for those preparing and leading worship and finding new ways to support, guide and strengthen your children. And we pray for those still carrying your gospel directly to others, through hospital chaplaincy and through the practical action of Christian charities. Help us to take the positives from this opportunity to rethink how the church 'does Easter' and to be refreshed by doing something different.

Easter Day continues to dawn around the world, and we pray for those in other lands affected by the coronavirus. Lord, we are finding it hard to live in lockdown, but most of us have safe homes and reliable supplies of food, water and medicine.

We pray especially for those parts of the world where living conditions mean that containing the virus will be so much harder. We think of those living and working in the refugee camps of Syria, Lebanon and the Yemen, the shantytowns of India or South Africa.

As charities at home and abroad struggle to maintain their services as financial contributions dry up, help us all to see how we can continue to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

Lord, as we celebrate your resurrection once again, help us always to remember your promises to us. You died so that we might live. In these difficult times, help us to not

merely to mark time, but to press on, to live life to the full and to be the Easter people, full of joy and thanksgiving.

Amen

Last year a social media post related to one of our churches suggested that Easter without our final hymn wasn't really Easter. *Thine be the glory.*

Hymn: Thine be the Glory

*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...

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 hast lost its sting.

Thine be the glory...

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...

(Edmond Louis Budry trans. Richard Birch Hoyle)

The Lord is risen! Alleluia!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Amen (Wild Goose Worship Group)

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† Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition