

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit

SERVICE AT HOME

– Sunday, April 9, 2023 (Easter Sunday)

prepared by the Revd Gareth Hill

**Easter Acclamation**

*You may want to say this a few times and let the truth sink in to your heart!*

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**Listen, read, pray or sing along**

See what a morning (StF 309)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET65Y1r3YeQ>

**See, what a morning, gloriously bright,  
with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;  
folded the graveclothes, tomb filled with light,  
as the angels announce Christ is risen!  
See God's salvation plan, wrought in love,  
borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,  
fulfilled in Christ, the Man, for He lives:  
Christ is risen from the dead!**

**See Mary weeping, "Where is He laid?"  
As in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;  
hears a voice speaking, calling her name;  
it's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!  
The voice that spans the years, speaking life,  
stirring hope, bringing peace to us,  
will sound 'til He appears, for He lives,  
Christ is risen from the dead!**

**One with the Father, Ancient of Days,  
through the Spirit who clothes faith with  
certainty,  
honour and blessing, glory and praise  
to the King crowned with power and authority.  
And we are raised with Him, death is dead,  
love was won, Christ has conquered.  
And we shall reign with Him, for He lives,  
Christ is risen from the dead!**

Stuart Townend (b. 1963) and Keith Getty (b. 1974) Words and Music: © 2003, Thankyou Music. Administered by worshiptogether.com Songs, excluding UK & Europe, administered by Kingswaysongs, a division of David C Cook <tym@kingsway.co.uk> Used by permission.

Let us pray.

Glory to you, O God:  
you raised Jesus from the grave,  
bringing us victory over death  
and giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, O Christ:  
for us and for our salvation  
you overcame death  
and opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit:  
you lead us into the truth  
and breathe new life into us.

Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever. **Amen.**

If we have fallen into despair,  
Lord, forgive us.

If we have failed to hope in you,  
Lord, forgive us.

If we have been fearful of death,  
Lord, forgive us.

If we have forgotten the victory of Christ,  
Lord, forgive us.

*Silence*

May the living God  
raise you from despair,  
give you victory over sin  
and set you free in Christ. **Amen.**

Lord of all life and power,  
who through the mighty resurrection of your  
Son overcame the old order of sin and death  
to make all things new in him:  
grant that we, being dead to sin  
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,  
may reign with him in glory;  
to whom with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit  
be praise and honour, glory and might,  
now and in all eternity. **Amen.**

**Readings:** Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24  
Matthew 28:1-10

**Listen, read, pray or sing along**

Lord, I lift your name on high (StF 332)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6Uv8GauD4A>

**Lord, I lift your name on high,  
Lord, I love to sing your praises;  
I'm so glad you're in my life,  
I'm so glad you came to save us.**

**You came from heaven to earth  
to show the way,  
from the earth to the cross  
my debt to pay,  
from the cross to the grave,  
from the grave to the sky:  
Lord, I lift your name on high.**

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**Sermon**

*Matt 28: 6 He is not here; he has risen*

**1 Do not be afraid**

The two Marys came to the tomb after days of fearful watching: an arrest, a trumped-up trial, a cruel death and what seemed like the end of all their hopes. Jesus had preached a new Kingdom - God breaking into human lives in a remarkable new way - but where had all that gone?

Matthew says they went to look at the tomb. Was that because it would be literally a rock-solid confirmation of their fears: Jesus really was dead and buried? Was it because they felt compelled to be where their Master was but fearful of how they would cope with their loss? Was it because this was the place to see if their promised hope in God had crumbled?

Into their brokenness comes an angel from God: arriving in an earthquake and the rolling away of the gravestone. In the prosaic way our English language works, they are told not to be afraid. Yeah, right!

Actually, we need to understand the translation of the phrase from the Greek to see what the angel meant. The women were told, “*no longer be afraid any more*”. It was a recognition of where they had been but a call to live with a different attitude . . . and to live it out persistently.

It is not a rejection of their grief. There is surely a heavenly acknowledgement of their tears because it is to the grave where God sends a messenger with good news.

Later, when the risen Jesus meets the women, he also tells them to “*no longer be afraid any more*”.

**2 He has risen**

The Good News the angel brings to the two Marys has substance. It's not “there, there. Stop crying.” It is to announce that death no longer has the last word. The stone hasn't been rolled away so they can go in and anoint the body - in fact Matthew doesn't refer to spices or anointing - but so the women can see that the tomb is empty.

And here beginneth the argument which has kept theologians, scholars and sceptics in employment ever since: did it really happen?

When I was training for ministry, one of my lecturers was quite sceptical about some of the Bible stories. For him the Exodus was a handful of people on a cold November Tuesday wandering out of Egypt rather than a decisive act of God; the Virgin Birth was very dubious. One evening an exasperated student shouted out: “well, what about the Resurrection then?” He went very quiet and said: “As much as I struggle with it, I just believe it happened.”

And that's the point. It is, at the end of the day, a matter of faith. What do you choose to believe? For many of us, it was a physical bringing back to life of a dead body. That's

where I stand. For others it is a symbolic truth that God brings the power of life into dead situations.

Whichever of these views - and perhaps others - we hold, what we can say for sure is that Jesus didn't bring himself back to life. It wasn't a magic trick to confound his killers. Again, English is limited and our Bible translations fail to convey the power of what happened.

When the angel says to the two Marys, "*He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.*", we need to remember Jesus' own words to his disciples:

*"... Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*

(Matthew 16: 21)

The proper translation of 'he has risen' is 'he has been raised'. It is an act of God that the disciples had been prepared for . . . but were utterly unready to take on board.

The reason Jesus is not in the tomb is because God has stepped in. Douglas Hare in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, says the resurrection is "God's comment on Good Friday". Evil did that ... I did this!

It's also not enough to say that Jesus would have risen because he is divine. That makes Good Friday a minor inconvenience and it was always more than that. Douglas Hare again: "if the rising was due to Jesus' nature, then his death on the cross was an empty charade".

Angels, earthquakes and the statement "he has been raised" are a declaration about the power and majesty of God breaking into human history.

### **3 Come and see . . . go and tell**

One of the worst effects of the pandemic lockdown was what unfortunately was called social distancing. There's nothing social about standing two metres away from everybody.

We love being able to invite people to 'come on in'. An invitation 'in' is a way of telling someone

they are welcome. For the two Marys, the angel's invitation inside the tomb is being welcomed into a holy space - where God has brought life and defeated death.

But the invitation is a two-stage call, and we need to be aware that the same applies to us.

They are invited to go in and see - to see that the tomb is empty and that Jesus has been raised. Then they are charged to go and tell. This is a clear statement that this couldn't be the early Church crafting a story just to persuade people that something unbelievable happened.

Why? Because it's the women who are given this task first.

Michael Green, the Anglican preacher, described this as astounding. He says: "... women counted for little in Graeco-Roman circles in those days. They were nobodies: they were goods and chattels; they could in some circumstances be offered for sale; they could not bear witness in a court of law. God perpetrates the supreme irony of having two women as the first witness to his Son's resurrection!"

Easter is a moment when we too are invited to "come and see ... go and tell" - to live in prophetic hope because the future is in God's hands - and he will make it right.

The writer, Philip Yancey, has a meditation called *The Day I'll get my Friends Back* in which he recalls three friends who have died and how difficult life can seem when the world appears broken.

In it he says: *'There are two ways in which to look at human history, I have concluded. One way is to focus on the wars and violence, the squalor, the pain and death. From such a point of view, Easter seems a fairy-tale exception, a stunning contradiction in the name of God. That gives some solace, although I confess that when my three friends died, grief was so overpowering that any hope in an afterlife seemed somehow thin and insubstantial.*

*'But there is another way to look at the world. If I take Easter as the starting point, the one*

*incontrovertible fact about how God treats those God loves, then human history becomes the contradiction and Easter a preview of ultimate reality.'*

May we live in the preview and the certainty that God will bring it about. Amen.

### **Intercessions**

In the power of the resurrection we offer our prayers to God.  
Let us pray.

Remember, O Lord, in your love  
the Church throughout the world . . .  
those recently baptized and confirmed . . .  
those who minister to others . . . *Silence*

May your whole Church know your power and  
be a sign that Christ is risen.  
Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love the world you have  
made . . .  
those who seek a fair and proper use of the  
world's resources . . .  
those who strive for justice and peace among  
the nations . . . *Silence*

May the whole earth be transformed by mercy  
and rejoice in hope.  
Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love those who suffer . . .  
the victims of violence and injustice . . .  
those who mourn . . . *Silence*

May all in need find comfort, strength and  
freedom in the living Christ.  
Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love those who have died:  
those who have confessed the faith and those  
whose faith is known to you alone. *Silence*

May all your children receive grace and light  
according to their needs and come at last to  
share with all the saints in life eternal.

Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Gracious God, we ask these prayers through  
Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

### **Listen, read, pray or sing along**

To God be the glory (StF 94)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nI8QtDur00>

**To God be the glory, great things he has done!  
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,  
who yielded his life in atonement for sin,  
and opened the life-gate that all may go in:**

***Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!***

***Let the earth hear his voice!***

***Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!***

***Let the people rejoice!***

***O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;  
and give him the glory — great things he has  
done!***

**O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,  
to every believer the promise of God!  
And every offender who truly believes,  
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:**

**Great things he has taught us, great things he  
has done,  
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  
but purer, and higher, and greater will be  
our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:**

*Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)*

### **Blessing**

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was  
raised from the dead, strengthen you to walk  
with him in his risen life;  
and may almighty God bless you,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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