

Easter Morning Service

From the United Reformed Church in Morpeth, Widdrington and Gt Bavington

Opening Words

Christ is risen; He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Hymn: 232 Christ the Lord is risen today

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Let creation join to 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!
Lo! our suns eclipse is o'er, Alleluia!
Lo! He sets in blood no more, Alleluia!

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal, Alleluia!
Christ hath burst the gates of hell, Alleluia!
death in vain forbids his rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Dying once, he all doth save, Alleluia!
Where's 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!

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia!
Praise to thee by both be given, Alleluia!
Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!
Hail the Resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

Charles Wesley

Prayer

Can it be true?
Did it really happen?
How can we be sure, Lord?
Were Peter, and John and Mary right?
Did you really rise from the dead
and leave the cross empty of its cruelty
and the tomb full of your resurrection promise?

Today, of all days, Lord,
we gather
as those first visitors to the tomb,

to see for ourselves,
and to proclaim to all we meet that
Christ our Lord is risen today.

In the meeting together on park benches,
in the shared smiles across our online meet ups,
in the kind words spoken over the telephone,
in the words written and posted in a letter,
we know the truth,
that you are here among us.

Whenever love is shared, your presence is felt.
Whenever prayer is offered, your ears hear our plea.
Whenever we raise our voices in song, your name is glorified.

Risen Lord Jesus,
we praise you today and always
for the hope that you offer to us.
In that Easter Garden
we see a new world created,
one where love conquers all,
and death does not have the final say.

We stand today in the shadow of that cross,
knowing our sins are forgiven,
and our relationship with God restored.

And we praise you and proclaim "Alleluia"
Amen

Reading: John 20: 1-18

Reading: Acts 10:34-43

Talk

It was April Fools Day on Thursday. The day when the authorities arrested Jesus and proceeded to prosecute him and plot his death, was April Fool's Day. I wondered if you've ever been fooled on April's Fool Day?

On 1st April 1957, the BBC Panorama programme showed a three minute segment featuring a family from Ticino in Switzerland carrying out their annual spaghetti harvest. It showed women carefully picking strands of spaghetti from a tree and laying them in the sun to dry.

In 1962 when Sweden had just one tv channel that broadcast in black and white, SVT brought its technical expert Kjell Stensson onto the news advising people who to convert their tv to received colour reception. It involved pulling a nylon stocking over the screen, and the mesh causing the light to bend in such a way as to cause a colour image to occur. Thousands

of people were taken in by the report.

On 1 April, 2010, Kodak claimed to have invented Aromatography, using a camera's sensors to capture smells in a photograph. Dr Museau stated that recent breakthroughs in Neuro- Optical- Nasal- Sense imaging (Or Nonsense for short) had enabled the technology to be developed. Kodak cautioned that not everyone could smell the images, but there was a significantly greater response among subjects born in the months between May and June.

You might remember the Flying Penguins documentary in 2008, hosted by Terry Jones as an episode in the BBC natural history series "Miracles of Evolution". It showed remarkable footage of penguins flying, while filming on the Falkland islands. Terry Jones said the penguins took to the air and flew thousands of kilometres to the rainforests of South America where they "spend the winter basking in the tropical sun."

It was used to promote the BBC iPlayer and the video became one of the most watched on the internet.

And on 1 April 2009, Google came up with a new app called Google Translate for Animals which could decipher what your pet was trying to tell you. Google said "We are excited to introduce Translate for Animals, an Android application which we hope will allow us to better understand our animal friends. We've always been a pet-friendly company at Google, and we hope that Translate for Animals encourages greater interaction and understanding between animal and human.

Sometimes when we hear something for the first time we can quite easily be surprised or even fooled by what we hear. Especially if it is something that seems too good to be true. Some of these past April Fools are reminders of how sometimes we have been taken in in the past, and we might feel foolish or gullible, as we reflect back on these stories now and wonder how we ever could have been fooled by them.

As we remember the familiar Easter Story this year, the shock and impossibility of it can get glossed over and taken for granted. We know the story and it is not the first time we have heard it. It seems like old news to us.

We would do well to put ourselves in the position of Mary and Peter and John on that first Easter Sunday – a day when it would have felt as if someone was playing a trick on them. A cruel and terrible trick. But

even so, they would have been taken in, and found the whole thing totally believable. Because they desperately wanted it to be true. We can understand that, we perhaps have been taken in by less serious things in our own way.

What is fascinating is when we read the passage from Acts that gives us a real insight into Peter's character, as this is his own later (considered) account of what happened, once he's had plenty of time to think things over. Having heard the news and been completely taken in, as the years go by, he doesn't show any signs of changing his opinion about the events of that day.

Can you imagine someone still today believing that penguins can fly, or spaghetti grows on trees, or we could translate what our pets are saying to us? Because over time, the evidence reveals the truth and destroys the deception.

But Peter's conviction does not change. He says "We are witnesses of everything he did. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all people – but by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."

And when we consider all the possibilities of what could have happened between that Friday and Sunday none of these options comes forward as a more credible account of what happened. Peter does not say "Well on reflection, Jesus didn't really die, he had just collapsed and he recovered" And Peter doesn't say "Actually after Jesus died we stole his body just so the movement he started didn't collapse." Peter doesn't say "It was just a trick – we didn't think anyone would take us seriously." And Peter doesn't say "we just wanted to see Jesus again so much, that the women and us just imagined him in that garden – and we were wrong"

When Peter in cold light of day, reflects back on the events of that day, he becomes even more convinced in the truth of the resurrection rather than less so.

Sometimes the strange truth is actually more likely. The facts and the circumstances point to Jesus dying and rising to new life. 2000 years later, we do not look back on this story, as we do the Spaghetti hanging from the trees. We see that for what it is, but the Easter story remains surprising and shockingly impossibly true.

No matter what the facts are. May we like Peter when we reflect on the events of that first Easter Sunday,

may we be able to testify and proclaim this truth with just as much conviction.

Hymn: 260 Christ is alive let Christians sing

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
His cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die!

Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
he comes to claim the here and now,
and touching every place and time.

Not throned above, remotely high,
untouched, unmoved by human pains
but daily, in the midst of life,
our Saviour, in the Godhead reigns.

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.

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.

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COMMUNION

PRAYERS (*David Clowes – 500 Prayers for all occasions, 2003, Published by David C Cook*)

We pray for those for whom the good news of Easter is just too good to be true;
for those who long to believe,
but are looking for proof when none can be given,
except to the eye of faith;
for those who will only accept what can be seen,
touched or scientifically confirmed;
for those who dare not believe
because of the challenge to their whole way of thinking.
and the changes it would require them to make to their whole way of living.
May the risen Christ touch their hearts with grace.
We ask our prayer

In the name of Christ.

We pray for those who feel they can go no further;
for those who have lost confidence and courage;
for those for whom hope is gone and joy has withered away;
for those for whom life no longer holds any promise and each day is a burden too much to bear;
for those who are ill and those who are dying,
those who care for them
and those who ignore them;
for those whose lives are empty, and with the passing of years have lost meaning;
for the lonely, alone and confused.
May the risen Christ give them peace.

We ask our prayer

In the name of Christ.

We pray for the church and for all Christians;
for those who live in the dark and fearful places in the world;
for those crushed with violence because of their faith;
for those facing pain and the evil intentions of others;
for those who are living and worshipping as if Christ is not risen but still in the tomb;
for those who have never experienced the joy, the freedom and the power
that raised Christ from the dead
and for whom faith means hanging on by the skin of their teeth.

We ask our prayer

In the name of Christ.

We pray for those who are afraid of stepping out too far into the deep waters of life;
for those who spend their lives in the shallows
and who never experience the wonder of life made new in the living Christ;
for those still seeking answers to the meaning of life, solutions to their problems,
and an assurance of God's real presence
but who will not risk looking for them in the empty tomb.
May the risen Christ transform their hearts.

We ask our prayer

In the name of Christ.

We pray for our world and for those filled with hatred and despair;
for those who never smile, never laugh, never cry;
for those who simply exist when God intended them to live;

for those who settle for instant pleasure
rather than risk opening their lives to the power of
Christ;
for those whose lives are ruined
as they clothe their existence with addictions
that promise everything now for a moment;
and for those who never hear of God's offer of life in
abundance
and his promise of heaven
because we do not tell them.
May the risen Christ open blind eyes and sealed lips.
We ask our prayer
In the name of Christ.

We pray for someone we know who needs to know
that they are forgiven;
for someone who longs to know that they can be free;
for someone we know who is empty;
for someone who is frightened, hurting, or just on
their own;
for someone who wants to know that God is real and
that he is always with them;
for someone at home, at school, at work or a
neighbour.
May the risen Christ stay with them, and bring them
peace.
We ask our prayer
In the name of Christ.

We pray for ourselves.
Lord, give us new joy in your presence and a new
awareness that you are alive.
Give us the courage to name you name with our lives
and our lips.
So fill us, we pray, with your joy and your power,
with your love and your grace,
with a trust in your dying and an experience of your
rising,
that our lives will simply overflow for your glory.
May we have the joy of leading someone to the foot
of the empty cross to find their Saviour,
and to the empty tomb to discover their Lord.
We ask our prayer
In the name of Christ.

Amen

Hymn: Oh Happy Day

The greatest day in history
Death is beaten You have rescued me
Sing it out: Jesus is alive
The empty cross the empty grave
Life eternal You have won the day
Shout it out: Jesus is alive

He's alive

*And oh happy day happy day
You washed my sin away
Oh happy day happy day
I'll never be the same
Forever I am changed
(What a glorious glorious day)
(I'll never be the same)*

When I stand in that place
Free at last meeting face to face
I am Yours Jesus You are mine
Endless joy perfect peace
Earthly pain finally will cease
Celebrate Jesus is alive
He's alive
And oh happy day happy day....

*Oh what a glorious day
What a glorious way
That You have saved me
And oh what a glorious day
What a glorious name
Hey*

Ben Cantelon, Tim Hughes
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Blessing