

Call to Worship: Mark 16:1-8

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

HYMN StF 298 Christ the Lord is risen today

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0_ThKzTvIo

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| <p>1 Christ the Lord is risen today ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
All creation joins to say :
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Raise your joys and triumphs high ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Sing, you heavens ; let earth, reply :
<i>Alleluia!</i></p> | <p>4 Soar we now where Christ has led,
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Following our exalted Head ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Made like him, like him we rise ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies :
<i>Alleluia!</i></p> |
| <p>2 Love's redeeming work is done,
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Fought the fight, the battle won ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Christ has burst the gates of hell :
<i>Alleluia!</i></p> | <p>5 King of Glory! Soul of bliss!
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Everlasting life is this,
<i>Alleluia!</i>
You to know, your power to prove,
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Thus to sing, and thus to love :
<i>Alleluia!</i></p> |
| <p>3 Lives again our glorious King ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Where, O death, is now your sting?
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Once he died our souls to save ;
<i>Alleluia!</i>
Where's your victory, boasting grave?
<i>Alleluia!</i></p> | |

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Prayers of Approach

If you were not risen, Lord Jesus Christ, to whom would we go, to discover the face of God?

If you were not risen, we would not be together, seeking your communion; and we would not find in your presence the forgiveness which enables us to make a new beginning.

If you were not risen, where would we draw the energy for following you, that journey which requires us to make new starts, to choose you again and again?

We bless you for your sacrifice and your triumph, and we trust you to lead us through all the tangles of life until we are fit to come fully into your presence. Forgive us our sins, we pray, and give us the grace to forgive others and extend your regime of love wherever we go. We are wholly dependent on you for this.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

The Thwaite Debate: Thwaite considers the Easter Egg Hunt <https://youtu.be/4YQKNDQ9abg>

HYMN StF 443 Come let us sing of a wonderful love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5G5YHsAgA0>

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| <p>1. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.</p> <p>2. Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.</p> | <p>3. Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above</p> <p>4. Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.</p> |
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Robert Walmsley

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:8-19

⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born¹.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

¹ "...one born of a miscarriage, thus he conveys that he is not a 'normal' member of the apostolic group, but one who has been 'snatched' out of his sin and rebellion". Gaebelein, F.E., Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol 10, 1976, p.283

Reading: Acts 10:34-43

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

HYMN StF 328 (ii) Jesus shall reign where'er the sun (Tune: Rimington)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SCE2ZTZ49M>

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| <p>1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does his successive journeys run ;
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.</p> | <p>4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns ;
the prisoner leaps to lose his chains ;
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who are in want are blest.</p> |
| <p>2 For him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head ;
his name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.</p> | <p>5 Let every creature rise and bring
its grateful honours to our King ;
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.</p> |
| <p>3 People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song ;
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.</p> | |

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Sermon

Jesus has risen from the dead; he has conquered death and sin. That is the Easter message which has been proclaimed for two thousand years now. But what do we mean when we say, “Jesus has conquered death”? Death goes on: all living creatures die, and we are acutely aware of our limited lease of life. Death is round the corner waiting for us, and we dread it. So, in what sense has Jesus conquered death?

The obvious answer is that he rose again, and has gone to prepare a place for us to dwell when we die. We talk of this at funerals, and assemble texts from scripture to underpin the message that we have a home elsewhere, which is the destination of the faithful who depart. But I think it is true to say that these days, some Christians are agnostic about this, and simply live their lives as best they can, subduing their expectations of a life to come. But isn't that a bit feeble? Paul warns us,

“if it is for this life only that Christ has given us hope, then we of all people are most to be pitied.”²

² 1 Corinthians 15

When Jesus visited his disciples after the Resurrection, he was the same person, but changed. They sometimes did not recognize him at first; it was only through mannerisms, when he spoke or acted in a familiar way that the penny dropped, and they knew him. And yet, although he was physically not quite the same, he carried the marks of his suffering, the scars of the nails and spear on his body.

So, death and suffering have had their effect, but Jesus is still here, and with us. He includes in his divine person his human experience: he is both human and also in another dimension. This dimension is called 'eternal life'. It is a difficult thing to describe because it is essentially beyond human experience, and therefore unknowable. John tells us,

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”³

What he is saying here is that eternal life, that is, life beyond our human experience, is particularly defined by direct experience of God. That is its essence. That direct experience, knowing God, is linked to knowing Jesus. Because we can more easily get to know Jesus, because he lived as a human person, we can grow in spirit, becoming linked to Jesus in our minds; having come thus far, we begin to have a way into the mind of God. That is a big thing to take on board; we do not talk as much as we should about what growing in faith means; all too often we just mention it as an objective. There is of course, a real problem, which is that it is so hard to describe in a meaningful way and I think we tend to avoid that problem. We often just mention growing in faith, and leave it at that.

Jesus conquers death (he comes back to life), and opens eternal life; but death is still there. We continue in heaven but also on earth, subject to the obvious outward limitations of being human.

So, what are the inward changes, to which the world may be blind, which bring us closer to life with God, that is, life beyond the human dimension? There are certain things which can be mentioned as matters of fact: a lack of fear about what life may bring, a resilience which enables us to live through various forms of nastiness, and suffering. But although these are important, they are not absolutes on their own; they are products of something else, which is a living relationship.

God exists in relationships. God is relational. We do not perceive God as a physical presence (after all, he has no body), though we might perceive him as present, through communication. He is present when he answers prayer and liberates us from our cares and fears:

In my distress I called to the Lord; he answered me and set me free. The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid. It is better to trust in the Lord than to depend on man.⁴

The language of imprisonment, of being a captive and set free, is used several times in this connection. God is able and willing to do this, and in every situation, however dire, is worthy of our trust.

So, that elusive state of eternal life, which can exist even here and now on earth, has trust at its centre. If we can persuade ourselves to trust God and thereby free ourselves from fear, he promises to be with us in this life, and beyond.

Well, the sceptical may be saying at this point, but is there a beyond? What evidence can we produce for that? It's a question rooted in a scientific mind-set, and no answer is possible if what is expected relates to physical evidence or sense-data. I know there are people who argue that beyond the present frontiers of science there are other truths secured on other intuitions about the nature of reality; I'm not competent to start expressing opinions about that, and I just

³ John 17:3

⁴ Psalm 118:5

remain agnostic about quantum worlds and parallel existences and repositories of information which logically must exist but which cannot be found. I just don't know, and the same will be true of at least some of you.

There is another word I mentioned at the start of this sermon: sin. Jesus conquered death and sin. Why are these two words linked like this? It is because sin occurs through lack of relationship with God. Sin starts when we are obsessed with ourselves, when we make little gods of ourselves and turn away from the God who is real. Jesus showed us how.

The stone which the builders rejected as worthless has turned out to be the keystone, the most important of all. This was done by the Lord; what a wonderful sight it is. This is the day of the Lord's victory; let us be happy, let us celebrate. ⁵

HYMN StF 306 Now the green blade riseth <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6xOVwvva7g>

- 1 Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain ;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been :
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.
- 2 In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen :
- 3 Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen :
- 4 When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been :

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872–1958) (*alt.*)

Communion: Introduction

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the space is thin between them.
Distance may divide, but Christ's promise unites
Those bounded by time, and those blessed by eternity.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the church above and below is one.
Peter is here, and Paul, Martha and all the Marys,
Columba and Francis, Theresa and Luther King;
The saints from far back, and those who left us not long ago.
And only sight prevents us from seeing them,
One with us on the other side.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the God who made them is present.
The Lamb, glorious on the throne, sits beside us;
The Spirit of God, the Dove, makes her resting place among us.
God inhales the breath of our prayers and spreads a table for our satisfaction.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

⁵ Psalm 118:22

We come as we are, because Jesus told us only to have a loving heart, and we remember his invitation and his promise:

“Come”, he said, “all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you peace. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest”

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger; and he that believes in me shall never thirst. I will not cast out the one that comes to me. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; they shall be satisfied.”

We come today in that peace, to inherit that rest.

Song: Lord of Life (v.1) StF 651 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcVaAfoie6A>

Lord of Life, we come to you
 Lord of all, our Saviour be,
 Come to bless and to heal
 With the light of your love.

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you
And also with you
 Lift up your hearts
We lift them to the Lord
 Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
It is right to give thanks and praise

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our pleasure to give thanks to God for his grace; for his bountiful creation, for the love which has fathered us forth, for his great gift to the world, our Lord Jesus; for his guiding ministry, for his death on the Cross, and for his presence ever with us, alive in the world, we give our heartfelt thanks and praise. Amen

Breaking

In doing this, we follow Jesus’s example and command.

On the night when he was arrested, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me. Likewise, after supper, he took the cup, and said, “This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me.”

Sharing *Please take bread and wine/juice as you are able*

Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

And also with you

Song: Lord of Life vv 1 & 2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiYa1zXs_Dk

Lord of Life, we come to you
 Lord of all, our Saviour be,
 Come to bless and to heal
 With the light of your love.

Through the days of doubt and toil
 In our joy and in our pain,
 Guide our steps in your Way,
 Make us one in your love.

Peace

On the evening of the first Easter Day, when the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you!" he said; then he showed them his hands and his side. On seeing the Lord, the disciples were overjoyed. Jesus said again, "Peace be with you".

Joyful in the presence of our risen Lord, let us share, as we are able, signs of peace.

Prayers for Others

Lord, on this great day of victory, we come to you in prayer with the suffering of the world on our mind. Hear us, we pray.

The country is rejoicing as the end of Lockdown approaches, but you do not have to probe far into the news to find signs of worry amongst medical experts and our political leaders about the future of the virus. In America, in France, Belgium and Germany, a third wave is already beginning, and the fear is palpable.

Lord, help us to understand how to manage this disease, and how to manage our society in relation to it, so that people may live full and healthy lives and that the economy may achieve an equilibrium. And in making this prayer, we acknowledge our good fortune with thanks; we have vaccine, we have a dedicated and dutiful health service, which despite all our jokes and derisive comments over the years, has risen magnificently to this huge challenge. Help, we pray, those countries hampered by poverty and by simply not having adequate access to vaccine. Make us, who are rich in comparison, generous, and willing to give fully to those in need. We have an opportunity to become good Samaritans.

And now, bringing our prayers closer to home, we pray for those we know of who stand in need of God's help today:

Irene Ashworth
Mary Baxter
Sylvia Benham
Karin Ingolfsrud
Alan King

Phyllis Lebbaeus
Pam Parsons
Mary Varndell
Jo McElveen
Beryl Langton

Rosemary Woodman
Janet Morris
Margery Sargent
Douglas Rippon

<prayers from congregation>

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offence, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
O Master, let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that one receives,
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

Amen

St Francis of Assisi

HYMN StF 313 **Thine be the glory**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6plhKbcn5g

1 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,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

2 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 hath lost its sting :

*Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

3 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,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

Edmond Budry (1854–1932)

translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875–1939)

Blessing

May the God who shakes heaven and earth, whom death could not contain, who lives to disturb and heal us, bless you with power to go forth and proclaim the Gospel. Amen.