

**ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE - 18<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2021- THIRD  
SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**INTRODUCTION**

*In today's Gospel, we find Jesus' friends huddled anxiously behind closed doors. How much of the past year have we spent in the same way? Suddenly, Jesus is standing among them! And what does he say to them? "Peace be with you." In the uncertainty, fear and tragedy, as well as the joy and celebrations of our lives, those are still Jesus' first words to us: "Peace be with you."*

*So, at the beginning of this time of worship, take a moment to collect your thoughts. Become aware of whatever in you is not at peace, and offer that to God's loving care, so that you can be free to meet with Him now, and discover His strong love, and strange peace.*

**OPENING BIBLE VERSE AND PRAYER**

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." (1 John 3:1)

**God the three-in-one, move in us now through your Spirit.  
Help us to worship, fill us with your peace.  
Help us to learn, fill us with your understanding.  
Help us to grow in faith, fill us with your love.**

**Jesus, light of the world, we welcome you now.  
Amen**

**TURNING AGAIN TO GOD**

Light of Christ, shine into me.  
Shine into the dark places of hurt and pain.  
Shine into the dark places of sadness and regret.  
Light of Christ, shine into me.

Lord Jesus, you are the way to the Father.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you are the truth which sets us free.  
Christ, have mercy.  
**Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you are the life which gives light to the world.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

May the God of love and power  
Forgive you and free you from your sins,  
Heal and strengthen you by his Spirit,  
And raise you to new life in Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## **God, the giver of Peace – a Psalm**

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness;  
you set me at liberty when I was in trouble;  
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

**How long will you dishonour my glory;  
how long will you love vain things and seek after  
falsehood?**

But know that the Lord has shown me his marvellous  
kindness;  
when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me.

**Stand in awe, and sin not;  
commune with your own heart upon your bed, and  
be still.**

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness  
and put your trust in the Lord.

**There are many that say, 'Who will show us any good?'  
Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us.**

You have put gladness in my heart,  
more than when their corn and wine and oil increase.

**In peace I will lie down and sleep,  
for it is you Lord, only, who make me dwell in safety.**

Psalm 4

## **NEW TESTAMENT READING – ACTS 3:12-19**

When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

Thanks be to God.

## **WHEN EASTER TO THE DARK WORLD CAME**

When Easter to the dark world came,  
Fair flowers glowed like scarlet flame:

*At Eastertide, at Easter tide  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

When Mary in the garden walked,  
and with her risen Master talked.  
*At Eastertide...*

When Thomas' heart was hurt and grieved,  
Then Jesus' wounds his doubts relieved.

When ten disciples met in fear,  
Then "Peace", said Jesus, "I am here."

This Eastertide with joyful voice  
We'll sing: "The Lord is King! Rejoice!"

### **GOSPEL READING – Luke 24:36b-48**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke:  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he

had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

This is the Gospel of the Lord:  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **REFLECTION – by Andy Todd**

Alleluia. Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

But so what??

Lent, Holy Week and Easter have been an intensive time of reliving the events of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection; but when the Easter daffodils have faded, the Easter eggs have all been eaten, and the pounds we lost during Lent have come back with a vengeance - so what? What does it all mean for you and me?

That wonderful and mysterious encounter we witnessed a moment ago between Jesus and his bewildered followers offers one answer to the question, "So what?" For you and for me, the fact that Jesus is alive means that we are to become **storytellers** – tellers of a story which changes lives, and by changing lives changes the world.

That's really what Jesus means when he says, "You are witnesses." Few things can be guaranteed to fill your average churchgoer with terror as much as being told they are to 'witness' to their faith! But witnesses simply tell the story of what they have seen and experienced. When you and I, like the first disciples, are asked to bear witness to the life-changing reality that Jesus is risen, I don't think we are being asked to try to defend all sorts of theological arguments that we may not fully understand and are not quite sure whether we believe. How far would those disciples have got as witnesses if Jesus had just left them in their initial bewilderment, without first showing them that he really was alive? Not far at all, I suspect! No, we like them are invited to tell a story which has first changed us; we are to be people

who can help others to find healing because we ourselves have first found healing.

What is the story we are to tell, the story which transforms us and can transform others? Very simply, it is the story of "repentance and forgiveness." Jesus' death and resurrection invites us to understand our need of forgiveness, and reassures us that forgiveness is possible.

Many times in the past I've wondered whether the Church doesn't go on far too much about repentance and forgiveness. Sometimes the language of our liturgy seems to wallow in self-abasement. Isn't the Gospel all about joy? Isn't it good news?!

But as I've grown older, as I have seen more of myself and of the world, I've come to suspect that it takes a lifetime of honest looking to understand the depths of the harm I have caused to others, and still cause. I would very much like to believe that deep down I am a good, kind person, who really cares about my neighbour, but sadly the truth is not so easy. In my more honest moments, I glimpse the reality of (to quote the well-known prayer) the evil I have done and the good I have not done. The message of repentance is quite simply an invitation to see that reality honestly, courageously - and without fear.

Without fear, because, hard as it is for me to look at myself honestly in this way, what Jesus' death and resurrection mean above all else is that forgiveness is possible. I don't need to live with the crippling psychological burden of guilt and regret. Bridges can be built; relationships can be mended. The endless cycle of pain suffered and inflicted can be broken. That is what the Cross and Resurrection point to. That is the story they tell; and what a story!

How am I to tell that story? How are we to tell it? Think again about those first disciples. Even when they had begun to see for themselves the wonderful truth of new life, they were still nervous, still only partly convinced. But they started to tell the story, and as they did so, they found that the story had a power of its own – to change others, and to change them. And so they told it more. That is exactly what we heard St Peter doing in the book of Acts.

The writer Martin Buber recounts that someone once asked a rabbi how you should tell a story. He replied, of course, with a story:

*My grandfather was lame. Once they asked him to tell a story about his teacher, and he related how his teacher used to hop and dance while he prayed. My grandfather rose as he spoke, and he was so swept away by the story that he himself began to hop and dance to show how the master had done. From that hour on he was cured of his lameness. That's the way to tell a story!*

Christians need to learn to tell faithfully the stories of the one who was wounded for our sakes, so that, like the rabbi's grandfather, in the telling of those stories we might be made whole.

What will the future hold for us as a Church community? I really don't know! It will likely be very different from what has gone before, but more than that – well, who can say?

But as we gather together around the altar, or on Zoom, telling the story of Jesus who suffered, died, and was raised to new life for us; as we find ways to stand alongside the marginalised in our local communities and the wider world; as we seek to look with courage and honesty at the depths of our own need and to accept the offer of forgiveness freely give; as we do all these things, we will be not just telling but **living** the story of the God who reaches out in love to His broken world; and we will, I believe, like the rabbi's grandfather, find ourselves being mended in the process.

### **PAUSE FOR REFLECTION....MAY GOD SPARKLE IN ALL OF US**

*This poem by Kathleen Hughes expresses beautifully what it means to live as tellers of God's story. I invite you to use it as a way of reflecting on how we as individuals and as community*

*can tell the transforming story of Christ's death and resurrection.*

May God sparkle in all of us  
As sunlight upon water.  
May we radiate for each other  
Compassion and hope.  
May our work be fruitful,  
Our joys profound,  
Our pain redemptive.  
May our discipleship be rooted  
In the very life of God.  
May we be for each other,  
For family, for friends,  
For those in need,  
For those especially  
Whose faith has come to staleness  
And whose hope has died  
- a burgeoning ALLELUIA  
- light and peace and simplicity  
- full gratitude, full openness.  
May we take nothing less for granted  
Than the life we seek  
To build up in common.  
May we suffer the pain of a  
Fully generous love.  
May we remain steadfast  
In the shadow of the cross,

And rise to meet the passion  
Of this world  
Relying always  
On the untiring good Spirit of our God.  
Amen

*Kathleen Hughes*

*[Spend a few moments in quiet, reflecting on what you have heard or read.]*

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Let us declare our faith  
in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Christ died for our sins  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he was buried;  
he was raised to life on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
afterwards he appeared to his followers,  
and to all the apostles:  
this we have received  
and this we believe.  
Amen.**

## **PRAYERS**

God has joined us together by His Spirit, and so we pray.

We bring to you, Lord  
The Church in all its richness and all its need;  
All its diversity and all its division.  
Give us a fresh understanding of what it means to live in you;  
May all of us – laity and clergy together –  
Celebrate the reality of your presence among us,  
Filling us with new life and new hope.

Lord in your presence:  
**We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord  
Our neighbourhoods, our nation, our world;  
All the areas that are fastened shut to hold you out;  
All the bewildered confusion about who we are and why we  
are here;  
All the doubts and insecurity,  
And all the searching for inner peace.

Lord in your presence:  
**We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord  
Our homes and families,  
And all the joys and sorrows of these times.  
We bring the rooms in which we eat and work and relax;  
And invite you in to them all.

Lord in your presence:  
**We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord  
Those who feel hurt by life,  
And all who find it difficult to trust in you,  
And those for whom finding forgiveness and peace  
feels like an impossible dream.  
We bring you those who need refreshment and hope,  
Comfort, healing and inner serenity.

We pray for all who are in any kind of need, especially; Adrina  
and Alan Price, Pam Mallaber, David New and Anna Clements.  
And we hold before you those who are on our own hearts and  
in need of prayer.  
*Silence*

Lord in your presence:  
**We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord  
Those who approach death with great fear  
And those who die unprepared to meet you.  
We hold to your mercy those who have died recently,  
including Prince Philip, Dave Walker, and John Cragge; and we  
ask you to comfort all who are in mourning today, including  
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, and all the Royal Family.  
And we remember those whose anniversaries fall at this time,  
including Tom Roberts, Mike Niccolls, Irene Everett-Perkins,  
Eric Orton, Peter Manning, Howard Cotterill, Alan Renwick,  
and Daphne Link.  
Have mercy on us all,  
Forgive us all that is past  
And gather us into your everlasting kingdom of peace and joy.

Lord in your presence:  
**We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord  
The love of our hearts  
As we recall the extent of your love for us  
Which understands our frailty  
And reaches out to us where we are.

Merciful Father  
**Accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,**

**Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

We pray the Lord's Prayer together as Jesus taught us, saying:

**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.**

**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.**

### **My Peace...**

My peace I give unto you  
It's a peace that the world cannot give  
It's a peace that the world cannot understand  
Peace to know, peace to live  
My peace I give unto you.

My love I give unto you  
It's a love that the world cannot give  
It's a love that the world cannot understand  
Love to know, love to live  
My love I give unto you.

### **ENDING**

**May the God who shakes heaven and earth,  
Whom death could not contain,  
Who lives to disturb and heal us,  
Bless us with power to go forth  
And proclaim the Gospel.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
The love of God,  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
Be with us all evermore. Amen.**

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