



AT HOME SERVICE

Sunday 7th April 2024

compiled by Angela Banfield - Lay Assistant

I hope it is not too late for me to wish you a Happy Easter. After all, the special joy that Christians feel on Easter Sunday is something to be celebrated throughout the year.

“Christ is alive let Christians sing, His cross stands empty to the sky”

Today our readings lead us to think about what makes the community of Easter People, or Christians, different. Not just in our beliefs, but in the way that in community we live out those beliefs as we respond to each other’s needs and those of the wider world. In the early days Jesus’ disciples were known as followers of the way. Remembering that Jesus said, “I am the way” I wonder if, had we kept the earlier name, would we have found the “imitation of Christ” (thank you Thomas A. Kempis), more of an obvious path.

So, we read in Acts 4 verses 32 – 35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

We pray

Heavenly Father, when we think of all the excitement and celebrations of Easter, and come this week to hear about life in your early church, help us to understand that to witness to a living, risen saviour, we must let him live in us, and through us, as those first Christians did. In Jesus’s name we humbly pray. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

Hymn: 297 STF

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

2] Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time

3] 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.

4] Women and men, in age and youth
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed In Jesus, freed for all.

5] 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.

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Prayer

In our hymn we cannot help but be touched by the third verse.

Let us pause to bow our heads before God, in memory of those who have died in recent conflicts and for those suffering today, particularly in the Middle East.

Lord in your mercy, please hear our prayers. Amen

Psalm 133 - A song of ascents. Of David.

How good and pleasant it is, when God's people live together in unity!

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the Lord bestows his blessing even life forevermore.

Prayer

Dear God we pray that all mankind can live in unity, that all mankind will live with justice, and in peace.

Lord in your mercy, please hear our prayers. Amen

Reflection

I wonder when you read the lesson from Acts today what stood out to you? Was it the remarkable power in which the apostles testified about Jesus' resurrection, something they had personally experienced; or was it the sharing and pooling of all the believers' resources?

We are in awe of the speech that Peter made to the people of Jerusalem, and praise God for his inspired words that brought so many to repentance and faith. (Acts 2 v 14 - 40)

I am often surprised by the eloquence of today's politicians, but sometimes there is a speech made that captures the world, Martin Luther King's, 'we have a dream' certainly comes to mind, and over the years I have heard some great sermons and inspiring preachers sharing, as those first apostles did, their experiences of Jesus, our living Lord. The important words here are 'their experiences' because simply passing on something we have read in the bible will not do. A resurrected Jesus is not someone to talk about in the third person, but someone to talk to. It's no good me telling you about him, you need an introduction to meet him and know him for yourself. Charles Wesley put it rather nicely in a hymn, 'O let me commend my Saviour to you. I set to my seal that Jesus is true.'

Our gospels, all four of them, can provide this invitation, but are definitely more powerful when endorsed by our personal testimonies. It's quite a good exercise at the end of the day to ask ourselves - what have Jesus and I been doing today? If the answer is, not much, then something needs to change. If it's, well, we've been here 'messaging about at home' that sounds pretty good,

If you have a list of things. You have my admiration!

We are invited to get to know Almighty God as a personal friend, because Jesus is alive and enabled by the Holy Spirit to be with each of us, always. That is what gave the apostles the inspiration and power to share their testimonies, their stories of the things that Jesus did and what he told them to do. This brings us rather neatly to the second amazing part of our reading from Acts. How everything was held in common and everyone received whatever they needed.

I think this is the more challenging part of our reading, are we to hand everything over to our church to apportion, or give up our right to buy and own what we want? I almost wish this wasn't in the Bible and with very few exceptions, I think most Christians do too. Perhaps, (and this is possibly another feeble escape route!) we can begin by viewing everything we have, or own, as belonging first to God.

It isn't ours to keep, but God has given us the enjoyment of whatever it is and also the privilege and fun of sharing and giving things away whenever we can. As with our testimonies, we will not be able to do this alone, we will need the power of God to see what we need to keep and what we can give away. Great, we can get to know Jesus better as we do it. He will enjoy that.

Hymn: 611 STF

1] Brother, sister let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you,
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

2] We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on a road;
we are here to help each other - walk the mile and share the load.

3] I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

4] I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh, I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

5] When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

6] Brother, sister let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you,
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

Richard A M Gillard (b.1953)

Let Us Pray

Lord, you ask us to feed the hungry and help those in need. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the world around us and don't feel our contributions are either enough or effective. Help us to offer what we have to you that with your blessing many will be blessed.

May your kingdom come and your will be done.

Lord Jesus, you ask us to teach people everything that you have commanded us to do. Sometimes we are not obedient and then our example causes confusion and rebellion to your way. We are sorry and pray that as we resolve to follow you more closely, others may discover the liberty and joy of knowing you.

May your kingdom come and your will be done.

Lord Jesus you are the Prince of Peace, in our war-torn world many live in fear of war and its terrible consequences. We pray for peace for all mankind, and that those in power and authority will abandon ways of violence and oppression. Teach us peaceful ways and gentle love for all, and help us to be safe havens for those who have lost everything through conflict.

May your kingdom come and your will be done.

We pray in Jesus' precious name. **Amen**

Hymn: 569 STF

1] An upper room did our Lord prepare - for those He loved until the end
and His disciples still gather there - to celebrate our risen friend

2] A lasting gift Jesus gave His own - to share His bread, His loving cup;
whatever burdens may bow us down, - He by his cross shall lift them up

3] And after supper He washed their feet, - for service, too is sacrament;
in Him our joy shall be made complete - sent out to serve as He was sent.

4] No end there is! We depart in peace; - He loves beyond the uttermost;
in every room in our Father's house - He will be there, as Lord and Host.

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Blessing

God bless us and keep us strong in faith,

God bless us and keep us full of love,

God bless us and enable us to be people on the way,

God bless us as we build His kingdom,

God bless us as we live in His kingdom.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus, be with us all. **Amen**