

Good morning and welcome to our morning worship on this third Sunday of Easter. We continue worshipping together, together and apart. These times are affecting not just our living but also our dying. Denied those opportunities for those times together at the end of life, our farewells feeling far from what we would want them to be, we are having to construct new rituals and postpone the ones we would have wanted for a later date. Today we hold in our prayers those who grieve and those who sit in that twilight time between life and death, those who wait in the shadowlands, suspended between the light and the dark.

I would like us to hold in our prayers this week our friends from the Memory Café. Over the years friendships have grown and we have shared in many of the joys and the struggles that life, illness and death brings. The café has and will be again a wee oasis of calm, of laughter and of sharing.

We are called to worship by the ringing of the church bell.

Thanks to Mark for the photo of lambs in the Bathgate hills. If anyone wants to send in a photo that we could use on a Sunday please do. We have another song from the millennium CD that so many of you talented musicians and singer appeared on. This is one of Robert's songs sung by Allison and is called The Price of Love.

Thanks to Jackie for our prayers for this morning. Prayers have been especially important during this time and we will continue to hold many up in our prayers. The importance of those prayers is felt by the many people who feel held in prayer and know that they are loved and never alone.

### **Let us pray**

Loving living God we come before you to praise and thank you for all the many

Blessings you give us. We lift our hearts and hands to praise your name.

Lord of this world You spoke, and the universe burst into existence. You breathed and the ocean broke against the shore. Lord of sunshine and creation we see your beauty and perfection in your creation.

How can we ever doubt your existence?  
Forgive us Lord.

Still our anxious minds during this uncertain, strange time. Journey with us Lord renew and rekindle in us a strong Spirit of Love, Faith and Hope. Walk with us hand in hand as we journey forward as beacons of light to a world in need.

And hear us as we boldly say the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,

your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory for ever.  
Amen.”

We are taking a trip through the book of Peter. It is written to a newly formed church of Gentiles. They have been called by God, they have encountered the risen Christ but they are new to the faith. Here they are being guided through the confusing feelings of a new convert. They are in alien land, strange surroundings in two ways. They are finding their feet in their faith, in this strange land of belief, and they are being pushed to the margins of their society. They are the strange

new cult on the block, they are not to be encouraged or trusted. They are in exile in their own community.

### **1 Peter 1: 17-23**

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply

from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

Amen

This letter of hope has language we do not always find attractive. God as father, yes, that's ok, but judge? We don't like to be judged. Like to judge, yes, but not to be judged. This is a challenge to the ideas of anything goes, do what you like, follow your dreams and dream for yourself. It is also a challenge to those who think that they have God all sussed out and know that they are right with God. God judges impartially. This is a repeated message in the bible. Those who think that they are in the in crowd are told that they aren't and those who think they are the outsiders are told that God considers them to be God's children. It can leave us feeling a bit disorientated, but that is another thing that re-appears in the bible, everything is a bit upside

down. How we deal with that feeling of uncertainty is through relationship with God, God the father. The author used three words which sum up the basis of that relationship, trust, faith and hope.

I think that trust is one of the hardest things that God asks of us. Trust, faith and hope will be pushed to the limits in some people just now. And then we hear how that trust, faith and hope will be expressed in their lives; genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. Love will keep trust, faith and hope alive, keep it alive and burning in our hearts. But that too can be painful. Many of our hearts break for the pain and suffering of others. It isn't easy carrying the broken hearted in our hearts, but that is what we are called to do.

Someone was telling me that one of the younger generation in their family was telling them that they felt that there was something

quite holy happening just now. It was a strange expression to hear just now and someone who wouldn't describe themselves as a church goer, there is something quite holy happening. But it was this outpouring of mutual love, something genuine, something not perishable like gold or silver, as Peter described this love. What was it that we all thought of as gold and silver, of valuable, important, highly prized a month ago? And what is it that we now think of highly valued, important, as precious as gold and silver?

In the middle of this time, this time when some of us will be clinging on to the last drops of trust, faith and hope, it is good to be reminded that this is a holy time too. It shows that when we see the world through the heart, we see love and love is all around.

Our Gospel reading begins far from love, or trust, faith or hope. We go back to Easter Sunday morning for this resurrection story.

Two disciples, Cleopas and an un-named disciple are getting out of Jerusalem and going home. We don't know anything about them, apart from that they were hurting. Their world had been turned upside down, they have been shaken to their core.

### **Luke 24: 13-35**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them,

"What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us.

They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the

Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered

together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Amen

The resurrection stories we read in the bible all start from a dark place. Last week we had Thomas with the disciples in a locked room, a room full of doubts and fears.

This reading has two grief struck and disorientated friends desperate to get home.

It feels like a walk of grief to me. I have said to many who have been bereaved that there is no map for the road of grief, we make the road by walking it. The journey of grief can be a tiny bit more bearable when we have a companion on the road, but still we have to walk it on our own.

Cleopas and his friend have been in Jerusalem. They have been there for the final brutal moments. Now they have to leave. They have to get away from that place of pain. The place that stole their hopes. I think that they would have gone anywhere, but home is where we are drawn when we hurt, we need to get home. They walk and they talk. Over and over the replay the events. We need to talk. We need to tell the story's we carry over and over again.

We need to tell them as many times as is needed to begin to make some sort of sense from them.

They are so deep in their story that they do not notice the stranger approach them, so deep in their story that they do not recognise him. He comes close, "what are you talking about?" You can sense the incredibility from the disciples, He doesn't know! My life has been turned upside down and he carries on as if

nothing has happened. Have you been there in grief, when the world seems to carry on, as if you were in slow motion but the world just carried on oblivious to how your world had just stopped?

He could have given many replies to their disbelief, but the one he gave was just perfect. One of the skills of active listening is in knowing when your views, your story, needs to be silenced.

It is about being able to create a holy space for the other person to tell their story: "What things?" he asks, and out it all comes pouring. The one they had invested so much in is dead, the loss that they felt, their hopes for the future gone, the resentment and the blame, the strange, mysterious visions, the questions. Out it all came pouring.

It wouldn't be my approach to bereavement counselling to tell someone how foolish they were, as Jesus does, but there is a need to

guide people back into their pain. To face their resistance and blame, “we had hoped”, tell me about your lost hopes, “they condemned him to death”, tell me about your anger and those you blame. We project so much of our pain outwards and inwards. In racing around for a target to fire our pain on, inside everything seems to slow to a stop. Jesus’ words are so descriptive for that time of grief, “how slow of heart”. How the heart, how time, how pain, slows to an unbearable speed.

And then he quotes scripture. A warning, quoting scripture in a time of pain should only be done by someone who knows what they are doing, like Jesus. And Jesus does two things with scripture, he brings their pain, their lives, into the bigger story of God, and he opens a new understanding of the bible, of holy things. They had seen the lightning, now they felt the thunder.

This strange healing that happened as they walked and talked wasn’t over yet. They had reached their home and Jesus made to go on his way. It was their initiative, they said, they strongly said, “stay with us”. This was some journey, from telling their disorientating, confusing story, to insisting that this stranger stay, that they we will make room for him, the night is coming, and the day is nearly over. The night time, a time of terror and a time of revelation. The day was nearly over, but there would be one last meal of the day.

The talk is good, it is needed, the piecing together of our stories and the story of God, but then there comes the time when words cannot carry us any further into the deep presence of God. We need rituals. We have experienced that recently with a burning candle on facebook at 7 each night, with a digital daffodil cross, we need symbols and rituals. Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. They remembered him

on the road, they remembered him in the stories that they told, they remembered him in their home and remembered him in the breaking of bread. They invited Jesus into their home and healing happened in their hearts.

The journey of their grief changed into a dash to see the other disciples, to be together. We long to be together, but we must find new ways of doing that and new rituals to help us heal.

As grief has been a focus of this reading, I would invite you to a time of reflection on Monday evening at 7.15.

If you would like to take part please spend some time today or tomorrow looking for a pebble or stone. Do not choose one too quickly. It will choose you, the colour, texture, the size or weight will be just right. All our grief is different, feels and looks different. You will know the weight it needs to be, the way it

looks and the way it feels to hold. Bring your stone and your feelings and we will walk the road to Emmaus, a lonely road but a road that leads to healing.

### **Jackie sent us a Prayer from Christian Aid.**

We have had word from Mulanje Hospital in Malawi and about how they are trying to prepare for coronavirus. We will think about Kalimpong. We are connected with others across the globe.

Let us pray:

Love never fails

Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope.

Love compels us to fight coronavirus alongside our sisters and brothers living in poverty.

Love compels us to stand together in prayer with our neighbours near and far.

Love compels us to give and act as one. Now it is clear that our future are bound together more tightly than ever before.

As we pray in our individual homes - around the nation and around the world - we are united as one family.

So, let us pause and find a moment of peace, as we lift up our hearts together in our silent prayers.

Amen

**Fischy music Bring it all to me.**

**Blessing**