

Welcome to our Easter Sunday service.  
You know the reply to 'The Lord is risen',  
'he is risen indeed'.

***The Lord is risen –***

Every blessing on this Easter Sunday.  
We meet in strange circumstances, but  
we meet together in the spirit of the risen  
Christ.

There have been some comments about  
the lack of singing in our services.  
Thankfully I have the CD that many of  
you contributed to for the millennium, so  
today there will be singing.

We will start with What a friend we have  
in Jesus.

Our opening prayer followed by the  
Lord's Prayer.

Jesus Christ, we greet you! Your hands  
still have holes in them, your feet are wet  
from the dew; and with the memory of  
our names undimmed by three days of  
death you meet us, risen from the grave.  
We fail to understand how; we puzzle at  
the reason why.

But you have come: not to answer  
questions, but to show us your face.

You are alive, and the world can rejoice  
again. Hallelujah!

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.”

### **Psalm 118 v. 1-2, 14-24**

<sup>1</sup> O give thanks to the Lord, for he is  
good;  
his steadfast love endures forever!  
<sup>2</sup> Let Israel say,  
“His steadfast love endures forever.”  
The Lord is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.

<sup>15</sup> There are glad songs of victory in the  
tents of the righteous:  
“The right hand of the Lord does  
valiantly;  
<sup>16</sup> the right hand of the Lord is exalted;  
the right hand of the Lord does  
valiantly.”  
<sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but I shall live,  
and recount the deeds of the Lord.  
<sup>18</sup> The Lord has punished me severely,  
but he did not give me over to death.  
<sup>19</sup> Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the Lord.  
<sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the Lord;  
the righteous shall enter through it.  
<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.

- <sup>22</sup> The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.
- <sup>23</sup> This is the Lord's doing;  
it is marvellous in our eyes.
- <sup>24</sup> This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it. [\[c\]](#)

The psalmist asks God to open up the gates of righteousness that he or she may enter in. Easter is about God opening up the gates, flinging them wide open, that we might enter in. It has been suggested that this was a song used when a new convert was welcomed into the sacred areas of the temple. One who was rejected is now the focus of all the religious ceremony. They go through the different temple courtyards, entering further and further into the holy site.

Someone lost but now found by God. A new life in God.

Jesus' parables would build on those ideas of the lost being found. Of the wayward coming home, not on their own doing but when down and out this gate appearing, a gate that did not just welcome them in but rejoiced at their return. It is the father rejoicing at the wayward prodigal coming home. It is the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep to seek and find the one who had strayed, it is the woman who lost one coin and throws a party for her neighbours when she finds it. It is the pearl of great price, it is steadfast love, it is a God who never gives up on us.

Our good news comes from the Gospel of Matthew.

## **Matthew 28 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

28 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and

indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

There weren't many that gathered that first Easter morning at the tomb, two Mary's along with an angel. Murray if you want to be the angel, I could be one of the Mary's, but that would be all we are allowed. But we can meet through the wonders of technology.

We can stay in contact, see and hear each other. We realise how important seeing and hearing each other has become. Soon we will meet face to face. That time will feel like another Easter moment.

Easter is a time for making us look at the world in a different way, with new eyes. Easter is an earthquake, when the ground should shake, our old ways of seeing and being should be disturbed. It should be disorientating and unsettling and even a bit fearful. And that is the time we are living in, disorientating, unsettling, and fearful.

Matthew's Easter story is about the incredible faith of two Mary's, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, we don't

get any more details about her, just her first name.

Matthew unlike Mark does not have the women coming to the tomb with spices, expecting to anoint Jesus' body and worried about how they will get to Jesus because of the stone covering the entrance. He has them coming to see the tomb. Not to see Jesus' body, but to see the tomb. Did they come expecting to see an empty tomb? Did they believe the unbelievable when all the men did not? They came to see the tomb.

When they got there, there was an earthquake. In Matthew's gospel the city shook when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. There was an earthquake at the death of Jesus.

Earthquakes are God's drumroll for the unexpected. Then an angel appears and rolls away the stone.

Earthquakes and angels. There were two guards, symbols of the power of the empire. On seeing the angel, on feeling the earthquake they faint, they become like dead men. The dead man, Jesus, executed by the empire is not there, while the guards, representing the greatest power the world knew, they were like dead men. And the two Mary's, the powerless followers of this peasant preacher, they were still standing. Do not be afraid. The greeting of angels, Do not be afraid.

The angle says I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. It is a strange way of putting it.

I know that you want to see the crucified one. Who would want to see a crucified body? Only those who have loved him.

Only those who could cope with the shock that such an image would cause. Only two women of much faith. 'I know that you are looking for Jesus, wounds in all'. Maybe angles see into our longing and our searching, our hoping and our faith. I know that you are looking for Jesus. Well come and see where he lay. You came to see the tomb, well come and see, see the tomb, the empty tomb.

Then the angle says, Go and tell the men. The angel asks them to witness to the men. The early church would have laughed at that.

A court would only accept a minimum of two men as credible witnesses, and no matter how many women gave evidence they would never be accepted as credible witnesses in that patriarchal society. It is the women who are asked to witness to this incredible event.

This is an earthquake that shook up the world and will lead us into a new one. Tell the men to get back to Galilee, the angel said, go back home, and Jesus will meet them there. Well at least the men would be the first to see Jesus. A bit of normal service resumed. But Jesus must have been off message with the angel. Or maybe Jesus just couldn't wait to see the two Mary's, the ones who had come to see the tomb.

He met them on the road back to Jerusalem. It is a wonderfully quirky way he meets them. Jesus says 'greetings'. Some argue a better translation would be 'Rejoice'. Let's have them both, 'Greetings, rejoice'. Such an ordinary expression and such an uplifting request. And they seized him and worshiped him.

One of the folks I read because he knows Greek and I don't, he says that the word seize is only used twice in connection with Jesus; the soldiers seize Jesus when they arrest him and the women seize him to worship him. The Mary's turn the seizing of arrest and death into a seizing for worship, they transform the violence into praise.

Then Jesus repeats the words of the angel, Do not be afraid, and tells the Mary's to go and tell his brothers to go to Galilee, I will see them there. The ones who had betrayed him, had fled, were hiding in a locked upstairs room; it was not 'go and tell my useless, cowardly, disciples', it was go and tell my brothers.

Easter turns all that we have done or failed to do into a glorious new relationship, brothers and sisters in Christ.

All this came from two faithful women wanting to see the tomb. Two women who were filled with fear and great joy.

In fear and great joy what earthquake moments are happening now? How are we shaken so that we see the world in a different way?

How do we hold on to a faith that is wanting to see the empty tomb when all we can do is hide away?

Might this be the earthquake time when the ones who want to see the crucified are the ones still standing and the ones who represent the power of the empire are dead like? When those who were never regarded as reliable witnesses witness to the truth?

Where seizing power becomes seizing worshiping opportunities, the times to sing and be grateful and give praise, and not to criticise, devalue and condemn? Might the earthquake moments become the time when we all become brothers and sisters?



None of that would be easy, earthquakes are never easy. The two Mary's left the empty tomb in fear and great joy.

This Easter is one of fear *and* great joy. It is of death but also of resurrection. This Easter is one where we might just be able to seize the future. For we are resurrection people and all things are possible. Hallelujah, Christ is risen.

## **Prayer**

Hold us now in our fear and our joy. Fear at what is going on around us, joy at what is born inside us.

Let us be excited at the thought of resurrection. We see it happen day after day, as we see death too. The broken and battered, the helpless and hopeless

and the saints who hold the righteousness of the world before us: who are willing to see the tomb, who want to see the crucified one, who do not crumble when the earth shakes, who witness to the hope of the risen one?

Lord, I thank you for those Mary's I have met with whatever name they were called, Mary's pure and true, who visit our tombs and tend to our fears, who sustain our shakiness and celebrate our joy.

As empires come and empires go help us to hold on to the joy of love and compassion, of tenderness and healing. We give thanks for our key workers, for those who have kept the fabric of society together.

So often overlooked and undervalued, so often women. May we witness to the work that they do. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, we are a resurrection people, we have seen the empty tomb and met the risen Christ.

Lord, welcome us in to your upside down kingdom of a shock-up world, for He is Risen, he is risen indeed.

Amen

### **Shine Jesus Shine**

Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father. Set out, then, on a new life with Christ.