



The United Reformed Church in Lion Walk
Christ Church United Reformed Church
The United Reformed Church at Chappel

Sunday 23rd April 2023

Call to Worship:

Kindle in our hearts, O God
the flame of love that never ceases;
That it may burn in us, giving light to others.
May we shine for ever in your temple,
set on fire with your eternal light,
even your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer:

Where shattered hearts are made whole,
where wounded souls are healed,
where life is stronger than death:
there, the stone has been rolled away.

Where the lonely become our friends,
where a stranger is welcomed home,
where hope is stronger than despair,
there, we find Jesus walking.

Where closed wallets are opened,
where the anxious find serenity,
where love is stronger than hate:
there, Jesus is opening our eyes.

The stone has been rolled away!
Jesus is our companion on the journey!
Our eyes are opened to the needs of others!
Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Alleluia! Christ is with us!

Spangling the black-blue night
with the twinkling stars
and spinning fluffy clouds
out of the fabric of your love,
you brought creation out of chaos,
Gracious God,
giving life and calling it good.

Walking with disciples
down grief's lonely road,

you told the story of how
God had raised you from the dead,
so that listening,
they might believe;
believing,
they might understand;
understanding,
they might obey:
going forth to invite all
to follow you,
Bread of Life,
to feast on your love forever.

Reaching out your love to us,
so we would touch others;
filling us with your gifts,
so we could be a blessing to the world;
piercing our darkness with hope,
so we might bring healing
to the broken:
you raise us to new life,
Spirit of God.

O Jesus Christ, sometimes we are so busy talking with each other that we fail to find you beside us. We walk on, so focussed on our questions that we do not create the silent spaces which would allow you to speak with us and enlighten our journeying.

Stay with us, Jesus Christ. Reach out towards us and invite us to pause and meet with you, we pray.

As we look at our lives and that of the world around us, we are sometimes too anxious to share our real questions or our doubts and fears. We keep them within us in troubled silence.

Stay with us, Jesus Christ.
Reach out towards us
and invite us to pause and meet with you, we pray.
We call your name, O Christ,
and hope to discover you here
in our community of vulnerable faith.

The Lord's Prayer:

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen

Reading: Luke 24:13-27

Hymn 67:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious,
thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains, high soaring above
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest,
to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish-but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.
And so let thy glory, Almighty, impart,
through Christ in the story, thy Christ to the heart.

Reading: Luke 24:28-35

Reflection:

Do we sometimes lament the loss of simpler times before there were electronic devices in every home, when families would spend time together talking to one another, telling stories. Casual gatherings in some comfortable place, perhaps around the kitchen table or over a meal. The children relating what they had done in school that day, the parents perhaps discussing the latest news in the country and in the world, the grandparents regaling the family with tales of life in the dim and distant past.

And as we hear these stories and tell stories of our own, we come to realise that they have a purpose beyond merely passing the time or entertaining the family. In the telling and hearing of our stories, we gain a clearer understanding of who we were, what our history is, and where we might be heading in the future.

Our stories might give us clues about our place in our community, in the region we live in, in the nation, and in the world. Our stories may tell us what it means to have the names we have inherited, the meanings attached to the places where we have lived, and the sort of people who have shared those names and those places before us.

Even made-up fictional stories, stories asking us to suspend disbelief, say something about who we are.

The resurrection appearance reported in today's Gospel reading is a story intended for those of us who were not in the inner circle. This resurrection appearance involves ordinary Christians

like us. People who *were* followers, but who played minor roles and who were not always mentioned by name.

The two people involved in this story are so obscure that we know nearly nothing about either of them. Indeed, one of them is not even named.

What we do know about them is that they were on their way to the town of Emmaus. We know that the subject of Jesus' death dominated their conversation and that they were deeply discouraged.

As they walked along, they were joined by a stranger. That was quite normal. Strangers often walked in groups on dark and dangerous roads. The stranger asked what they were talking about, and the two disciples were surprised. They didn't know how anyone could have been in Jerusalem over the past few days, and not know what had happened.

The stranger asked a couple of questions and they told him their story. They told of Jesus as they had come to know him. They recounted the dreams they had started to dream, dreams that had seemed so real, so possible because of their life with Jesus. "We had hoped," they said, "that he was the one to redeem Israel." We had hoped...

Their story was of shattered hopes, and in response to their distress, Jesus told *them* a story. In fact, he told them a lot of stories. Before he was done, Jesus had reviewed for them the scriptural foundation on which their hope for a Messiah had been built. None of the stories were new to these disciples. They had heard them since they were old enough to listen - and they heard them clearly this time. They heard them, but they didn't fully hear them. They heard them, but they did not recognize the power behind the words they were hearing. Because they did not hear fully, the stranger who was talking with them remained a stranger. Indeed, he remained a stranger to them until they sat down for the evening meal.

At the table, even though the stranger was the invited guest, he took the role of host. He took the bread and said the blessing. It was in that moment, the moment of the blessing of the bread, that mere hearing was replaced with recognition and understanding. The disciples realised that they had been in the presence of their Risen Lord through most of that long afternoon.

We are told they had reached their destination for the day and that night had fallen. We know that travel at night was a dangerous undertaking in that place and time. We also know that those two disciples abandoned their evening meal and the safety of their lodging and lost no time in returning to Jerusalem because they had a story that had to be told again. Never mind the distance. Never mind the danger. The Lord is risen, and the rest of the community needs to hear about it.

This resurrection story is a story for all of us. It gives us an assurance that the Risen Lord is with us, even when we don't recognise him or hear him clearly. It also us a clue to the sort of response we ought to make.

We discern from the resurrection stories that we can meet Christ in any place, in any person, in any situation, just like the disciples met him on a road, in a room, at the beach, on a mountain. And this particular story of the road to Emmaus reinds us tha having seen, having met, having liostened and having recognised, our next step is to go on and tell our story.

And it is in and through the life and witness of the Church, the community of the faithful, that we are strengthened and fed for our journey and emboldened and equipped to tell our story - strengthened so that we may tell our story to a world that desperately needs to hear it. We are fed so that we may share the bread broken for us, with a world that is waiting to be fed.

Hymn 33:

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory
cascades through life in overflowing grace,
to tell creation's meaning in the story
of love evolving love from time and space.

Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious,
in you, deserted, scorned and crucified,
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness,
and flawed humanity is glorified.

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother,
embracing us in love serene and pure:
you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother,
as fully-grown children, confident and sure.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;
love which commands, enables and obeys:
you give yourself, in boundless joy,
creating one vast increasing harmony of praise.

We ask you now, complete your image in us;
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal.
May love in us seek love and serve love's purpose,
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ,
in this world where hopes are so often dashed
and dreams so often broken,
we remember today the stories of faith in the future you brought to so many.

Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded,
may hope flower again.

We remember the story of how Mary and Joseph looked forward
to the day of your birth,
how shepherds and magi caught their breath in wonder
as they knelt before you,
how the hearts of Anna and Simeon leapt in anticipation,
and how your disciples
and the crowds that flocked to hear you gave thanks,
convinced that you were the Messiah, the one God had promised,
the long-awaited deliverer come to set them free.

Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded,
may hope flower again.

We remember the story of how that vision of the future
was shattered by events to follow -
your pain, humiliation, suffering and death -
hope ebbing away as the lifeblood seeped from your body -
an end to their dreams, an end to everything.

Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded,
may hope flower again.

We remember the story of how the news spread that the tomb was empty,
the stone rolled away, your body gone,
and how despite it all,
your followers could scarcely bring themselves to hope -
afraid to take the risk of faith
in case they should face the heartache of losing you once more.

Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded,
may hope flower again.

But we remember finally the story of how you appeared,
in all your risen glory -
in the garden,
in the upstairs room,
on the Emmaus road,
by the Sea of Galilee -
and the dream was born again,
the smoldering embers of faith rekindled.

Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded,
may hope flower again.

Lord Jesus Christ, a world is waiting,
hurting,
longing,
searching for hope,
crying out for meaning,
hungry for some reason to believe in the future.
Come again in your living power,
and bring new life to all.

Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded,
may hope flower again.

I invite you now to spend a few moments with your own prayer, in words or in silence; or simply in reflecting upon the stories we have read and the words we have heard in our worship today.

Hear our prayer, which we offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn 344:

God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient Church's story;
bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil round us
Scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us,
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days.

Cure thy children's warring madness;
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the gift of thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore.

Benediction:

May God bless the world in which we move,
and bless our home and bless our friends.
May God bless the eyes with which we see,
and bless the ears with which we listen.
May God bless the way we use our hands,
bless the way we employ our words.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us and with all those we love, today and for ever more. Amen