



The
United
Reformed
Church

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

Sunday 9th April 2023

Our worship today includes the sacrament of Holy Communion. You are warmly invited to participate, and I'd invite you to provide yourself with a little bread and wine, or a cracker and some fruit juice, or any thing that can symbolise for you the body and blood of Jesus.

Call to Worship:

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!
Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!
Exult, all creation, around God's throne.
Jesus Christ, High King of heaven, is risen!
Sound the trumpet of salvation! Alleluia!
Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour;
Radiant in the brightness of your King!
Let this place resound with joy, echoing the
mighty song of all God's people! Alleluia!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, this is a season of new beginnings - not just the resurrection story we read in the Bible, but the resurrection of broken dreams, crushed hopes, shattered faith - and we praise you for it.

Yet it's hard sometimes to believe that such new beginnings can apply to us, that we too can start again. We look at our own situations - the problems that refuse to go away, the mistakes we go on making - and we see little prospect of change, no reason to believe that life can be different. But you have promised that all things can be made new, that we can be renewed, refreshed, remade through your grace.

Help us to remember that, for your followers, there seemed no reason to hope. They had seen you die, and they knew that, each in their own way they had brought you to it, not so much through their forsaking you in your time of need as in the human weakness and sin which that represented - the self-interest, the lack of commitment, the willingness to compromise that is so characteristic of us all. They were racked by remorse, tortured by guilt, all too aware of the limitations of their faith.

You came to them, risen and victorious, and to those same people who had failed you so miserably there came new power, new conviction, new strength, new purpose.

Teach us, however often we may fail, never to lose sight of that truth. Save us from losing our sense of all that we can do for your kingdom, from growing disheartened, disillusioned, resigned to treading the same old ground rather than stepping out into new avenues of faith. However much it may feel we are getting nowhere, however often we may find ourselves at what seems

like a dead end, keep us open to the journey of discovery you hold before us, and give us faith to walk with you, wherever you would lead us, confident of your transforming power in our lives.

Lord Jesus Christ, this is a time of new beginnings, a fresh start, a day in which we celebrate the promise of resurrection for all, your gift of new life from old, and we praise you for it. Risen Saviour, conqueror of sin and death, raise us to newness of life. Hear our prayer, for we offer it in your name. 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen

Reading: John 20:1-10

Hymn 232:

Christ the Lord is risen today,

Alleluia!

let creation join to say:

Alleluia!

raise your joys and triumphs high,

Alleluia!

sing, ye heavens; thou earth, reply:

Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done,

Alleluia!

fought the fight, the battle won;

Alleluia!

lo! our sun's eclipse is o'er;

Alleluia!

lo! he sets in blood no more.

Alleluia!

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;

Alleluia!

Christ hath burst the gates of hell:

Alleluia!

death in vain forbids his rise;

Alleluia!

Christ hath opened paradise.

Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King;

Alleluia!

where, O death, is now thy sting?

Alleluia!

Dying once, he all doth save;

Alleluia!

where's thy vict'ry, boasting grave?

Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ hath led,
Alleluia!
following our exalted Head;
Alleluia!
made like him, like him we rise:
Alleluia!
ours the cross, the grave, the skies.
Alleluia!

Reading: John 20:11-18

Reflection:

Our Easter proclamation is that Christ is alive.

But the very logical question asked by many in today's world is: If Jesus is alive today, where is he? Why do we not meet him as the disciples met him on the day he was raised from the dead and on many occasions after that? Why do we not meet him as Paul met him years later? Why can we not see him?

This question bothered the writers of the gospels as well. They, too, believed with a passion in the reality of the resurrected and living Christ. But where was he? Luke in his gospel gets round this awkwardness by saying that, after a period in which he appeared to his disciples, he then 'withdrew from them and was taken up into heaven'. Luke later told, in the Book of Acts, how the Spirit came upon the people at Pentecost. For Luke, then, the risen Christ was alive and living in heaven in the presence of the Father.

But Matthew's gospel says something different in its very last verse. The risen Jesus is meeting with disciples in Galilee, where they have gone to meet him as he instructed them. He appeared to them and they worshipped him, though some doubted, and he gave them the Great Commission to take his mission to the world, and then he said, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age'.

The church has taken on board both Luke's understanding that Jesus 'sitteth at the right hand of the Father' and Matthew's understanding that he with us always, to the end of the age. It is part of our celebration today to say that Jesus is alive. Not *was* alive but *is* now gone, but *is* alive and with his people today. But we are faced with the same question again. If he is alive today, where is he? What does he do? What difference does it make to the lives of Christians and to the life of the world to claim that Jesus, once raised from the dead, is alive for evermore and is with his people in the 21st century? After all, the Easter event we celebrate today is more than just a miracle that took place a long time ago and had its impact on those who encountered it at the time. Rather, our claim as Christians is that the resurrection has significance for all people and for all time. What, then does it mean for us? How do we encounter the risen Christ in our world, in our time?

That's a question whose answer may be different for each of us, but think of those who first encountered him. They often failed to recognise him. They met him in a room, they met him on a road, they met him on a beach, they met him on a mountain. Sometimes they didn't know who he was straight away; some doubted him. So where do we meet him?

Think of a family meal. A happy informal gather of people who love each other, eating together, sharing news, sharing laughter, sharing food. perhaps we meet him there.

Think of a celebration, a wedding or a birthday party. There is joy and happiness. We are with people we love, we are sharing the gladness of a special occasion with them, rejoicing and joining in their happiness. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of a time of crisis, a time when we are uncertain and in need of guidance, a time when we are worried about some decision we have to make and are unsure of what to do for the best. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of a day's work, when there are demands upon us, things to achieve, expectations to fulfil; a day when we have time to think of little else but getting done what we have to do, when we are tiring ourselves out because we want to do a good job, and we have no space to think of ourselves, when even our faith is crowded out by thoughts of getting the job done. perhaps we meet him there.

Think of a walk in the country with a group of friends. A relaxing walk that gives us the time to forget our worries and enjoy the company of others, and an opportunity to enjoy being out in the fresh air and to admire the scenery. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of a service of worship in church, when we hear the words of the Bible; when we listen again to well known stories and sing well known hymns, when we explore together aspects of the faith and make new discoveries about what the Bible is saying to us. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of the troubled places of the world, when our conscience is troubled by reports of poverty and starvation; when we are made to feel guilty about our affluence; when we realise how blessed we are - and how selfish we are. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of a hospital, a care home, a safe house, a foster home, a prison. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of a busy High Street at ten o'clock on a Saturday night. The pubs and night clubs are packed with young people; there are long queues of noisy revellers outside the clubs waiting impatiently to be allowed in by the bouncers. There is a great deal of alcohol being consumed, a great deal of money being spent. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of being alone, maybe sitting in a darkened room listening to a powerful piece of music. there are no other distractions, we are not busy, we are not active; there is no-one else around; we have peace. Perhaps we meet him there.

Think of being in Asda or Tesco on a Saturday morning. Life is going on all around us; there are women, men and children, families stocking up on their provisions for the week or for the month. The store is busy with people engaged in one of the most necessary activities of all, providing food for themselves. Perhaps we meet him there.

Where do we encounter the risen Christ? Maybe we encounter him in the people we meet every day, in the daily humdrum activities of human life, in times of crisis and in times of celebration, in worship and in the so-called secular world. And maybe, like the disciples, we find it hard to recognise him in the faces of the people we meet; and maybe, sometimes, there comes to us the sudden understanding that we have seen him, that he is here, that he is alive, and that he is with us, even to the end of the age.

Hymn 243:

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid him, Love whom we had slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Communion:

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Let us pray
Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love,
you are beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,
you are creative and self-giving,
generously moving
in all the near and distant corners of the universe.
Nothing exists that does not find its source in you.

Through fear-filled days and aching nights
when the powers of death have done their worst,
your love has never deserted us.
Even when we turn away from you, you are with us;
your presence never fails us,
your gifts of hope and new life transform us.

We praise you for Jesus Christ,
risen to life, eternal as your love.
With the women at the tomb,
we raise the strain of gladness.
Hallelujah! Life is stronger than death!
The day of resurrection has come, scattering fear and gloom.
And so we rejoice with all your people of every time and place. Amen

It is Jesus, God incarnate, the Risen Christ,
who joins us together as a community of broken but hopeful
believers:

loving what he loved
living what he taught, and
striving to be his faithful servants
in our time and place.

In this meal we remember Jesus, his promises,
and the price he paid for who he was, what he said, and what he did.

On the night before Jesus died,
he took a loaf of bread,
gave thanks, broke it, and said,
“Take and eat, whenever you do this, remember me.”
After supper, Jesus took the cup, and poured, saying,
“This is the new covenant, remember me.”

We do remember.
We remember his life of love, his friendship, his teaching, his dying, and his rising to life again.

Let us Pray

Holy Mystery, God the Spirit,
we call on you to transform these familiar things,
as you continually transform the world around us.

Bless this bread and this cup,
the wheat and the grape,
the farmer and the harvest,
the seed and the sower.
So that in the sharing of these simple elements in community,
we may taste and see your goodness.

Through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory is yours, God most holy,
now and forever. Amen.

Breaking the Bread, Pouring the Cup, Sharing the Meal

The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the

same way also he took the cup after supper saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

This bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. Take and eat, this is the
body of Christ; do this in remembrance of him.

This cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ. This cup is the new
covenant in the blood of Christ; do this in remembrance of him.

Prayer after Communion

Thank you, O Christ, for this feast of life.

We are fed by your love;
we are strengthened by your life.

We are sent forth into this world to live your way and share your joy.

We are now commissioned to:
feed as we have been fed,
forgive as we have been forgiven,
love as we have been loved.

Thanks be to God.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we remember new beginnings rising out of what had seemed like the end; we recall how your resurrection changed the lives of the disciples, calling them to let go of the past and embrace the future - their role no longer simply to follow but to lead, to go out in your risen power and proclaim the good news. We know that life must change for us too, but sometimes it is harder than we thought; moving on can be painful, asking more of us than we feel able to give.

Reach out to all who are finding endings hard to bear. We think of those reeling from the termination of employment, the breakdown of a relationship or eviction from their homes.

We think of those whose children are leaving home, family and friends moving away from each other, communities facing the upheaval of change.

We think of those coming to terms with unfulfilled ambitions, let down by broken promises, or overcome by sudden catastrophe.

We think of those disabled by disease, mourning the loss of loved ones, or suffering from terminal illness.

WE think not only of others but of ourselves. Show us those areas in our lives where it is time to draw a line and move on - forms of service which are no longer fruitful, activities no longer appropriate, dreams no longer viable.

Give us the wisdom we need to understand when it is necessary to accept change and even to welcome it, and give us courage then to stride out in faith, confident that you will lead us from the old to the new.

Lord Jesus Christ, remind us again today that endings can lead to new beginnings, that from the old, new life can spring, and may that confidence touch our lives and bring hope to our troubled

world. Receive our thanks for all that has been, and open our hearts to all that shall be. We ask it in your name.

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 247:

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won;
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay.
Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
let the Church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting:
Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life;
life is naught without thee: aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above:
Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

Benediction:

Today we have celebrated
the glorious Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.
Let us go forth, rejoicing in the knowledge
that Jesus is alive.
Alleluia!

Today, we look to the future -
to the new dawn of Eastertide
Let us go to live as people bathed in the light of resurrection.
Alleluia!

Today, we remember the day when creation was made new
when God showed humanity its destiny.
Let us go as people living in the knowledge
that through the triumph of Jesus over death
the gates of God's kingdom are opened.

And may the grace, mercy and peace of God, father, son and Spirit, be with each one of us and with all those we love. today and for ever more. Amen