

Easter Worship 2020



Music

Call to Worship

We have travelled a long way
through Holy Week and Easter.
Now we gather in God's name.
We know the story of Jesus' suffering and death,
and remember how the disciples were scattered in despair.
Now we celebrate Christ risen from the dead.
We have been silent in the face of failure and fear,
but now we find our voices.
Now we shout the good news, & sing alleluia. Amen.

Easter Prayers

Lord God,
early in the morning,
when the world was young,
you made life in all its beauty;
you gave birth to all that we know.
Hallowed be your name.
Early in the morning,
a voice in a graveyard
and footsteps in the dew
proved that you had risen,
that you had come back
to those and for those
who had forgotten, denied and destroyed you.
Hallowed be your name.
This morning we celebrate
your creation, your life,
your death and resurrection,
your commitment to us;

so we pray:
Lord, bring new life where we are worn and tired;
new love where we have become hard-hearted;
forgiveness where we feel hurt or where we have wounded;
and the joy and freedom of your Holy Spirit
where we are prisoners of ourselves. Amen.

Music

Psalm Reading

Psalm 118

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
Let Israel say,
«His steadfast love endures forever.»
The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
«The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;
the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.»
I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.
The LORD has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.
Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.
This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.
I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.
This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Music

The Easter Story from Luke 24: 1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Sermon

Women in the Dawn

Sisters and brothers,

it is Easter, and for the first time in 20 years I am not in Peace Church on this significant day. It breaks my heart. I love you and I miss you.

But here we go...

In our Bible passage we meet people who had gone through hell, who had lost all they'd loved and believed in. And we will rest a bit with them and see how they are trying to come to terms with the catastrophe of their lives.

Four or more women began their journey just before the break of day. They were full of grief and had unnerving questions about the future.

Women filled with fears and anxieties, hurt by loss, stunned by failure, angry about rejection, and fed up with dashed hopes and broken dreams. They had so much love to give, and they walked down their road with aching hearts. They had painful memories and wounded spirits, and they longed to do something... give their trembling hands a job and their despairing minds a direction...

They were on their way together, united to empower each other. They travelled as a community, they travelled, if you like, in history, and they travelled for us.

They nurtured each other and became midwives to each other's hopes and dreams. Their story is worth telling. It is a story worth being remembered. It is the story of the very first Easter Sunday.

It is a story of love, responsibility and devotion. They were not making this journey out of overwhelming hope and eager anticipation. They had no knowledge of an Easter. They had no awareness of a risen saviour. They had no foresight of an angel near the empty tomb.

This was no high, holy and spiritual trip they were making. But they were in process, they were moving forward, they were on their way to see about a cold and dead body.

These bold women came to attend to a body that was already in a death cloth. They came to do their last act of love for a dead man. Early, in the dark, before the first sunbeams lit the sky, they were on their way. And as we know: the darkest hour is just before dawn.

The women had fragrant spices and wash rags in their hands...

They were travelling after having been standing at the foot of the cross for these terrible hours of torture and pain. With breaking hearts, they had witnessed the dying of their beloved friend.

They had heard the hammer hit the nails; they had seen the nails tear his flesh. The mocking of the crowd had pierced their ears, and the rupture of his heart had surely broken theirs. They had been there and had seen with their own eyes that cruel Roman soldier take a spear and pierce him in the side... For six hours they had been standing watching Jesus die.

They had been part of the small funeral. They had seen the closed tomb. They had watched strong men seal the entrance with a stone at least six feet wide and three feet high. They had observed the law and had become the official mourners for this dead Jewish man.

Tired, mourning and grieving, filled with despair these bold women set out on a journey to the tomb again to see about Jesus.

In Mark's version of our story they ask each other, who would roll the stone away for them so they could do for Jesus a last act of love and tenderness. The question was fair enough because this stone was a huge obstacle on their way to their last encounter with their killed friend. The stone became a stumbling block to the fulfilment of their mission. It was part of the harsh reality they had to deal with.

Yet despite the stone, they were on their journey. They expected difficulties, yes. They had no idea what to look forward to. But they kept moving on...

They somehow must have imagined themselves past the stone... They knew what they would do behind the stone... They kept on going despite the fear and the open questions, because they had

a united vision of somehow managing... There was a man who needed their care, and no stone would keep them away!

When the women arrived at the tomb, they found that the stone had already been rolled away. When the women arrived, seeking a dead body to take care of, they found a living angel with a message of hope for them to share.

When the women arrived at the tomb, they witnessed Easter and new life.

They had been terrified, afraid, filled with fear, - their common sense would have kept them inside the upper room or any other safe house, if there was one in the Jerusalem of those days, - but because they were brave women they had stayed on their journey doing what needed to be done.

Even though there is no explanation to the stone having been moved, the good news to the women then was that stones can be rolled away. And the good news to us today is that stones don't have to hinder our life journeys to be travelled.

Each of us has a stone story to share.

The stone of pain and grief which occupies our spirit.

The stone of failure and loneliness which grips our hearts.

The stone of family members who make us worry out of all proportion.

The stone of desperate finances and unpaid bills...

The stone of loosing your house and having to leave your home...

The stone of broken friendships and poisonous relationships...

The stones of gossip and loose tongues, of twisted truths and aching hearts...

The stones of diminishing health and limited physical strength...

Stones enough to weigh us down and make us feel paralysed, but then we meet these early Easter women and experience with them that stones can disappear, and that somehow this must have something to do with Jesus who did not stay among the dead but rose to new life...

Bold women were the first ones to arrive there at the grave on Easter morning.

They were the witnesses that Jesus had risen, and that the resurrection had happened. And with them we are witnesses too.

We too can see stones being rolled away.

We too cannot be kept away from journeying to see Jesus.

We too can experience an empty tomb and hear the angels tell us to run and tell the story.

The broken world in which we live is crying out for us to be as bold as the first Easter women were and with them change the place where we live with our song.

No longer do we have to wait in fear and hide away, we can, as these women did, meet the risen Christ and be empowered for the days and tasks ahead. Amen.

Music

Prayer

Bless to us, O God, this day, fresh made.

In the chorus of birds – bless us.

In the scent of blossoms – bless us.

In the wet grass and the spring flowers – bless us.

In the songs and stories – bless us.

In sun and moon – bless us.

Bless us and heal us,

for we come to you in love and trust.

We come to you in expectant hope...

O God, give us a well of tears

to wash away the hurts of our lives,
give us tears to cleanse the wounds,
to bathe the battered face of our world.
Give us courage, God,
to see the world's needs and to stand up for new life.
Give us wisdom and compassion to fight for freedom, justice and peace.
And grant us the light of the Easter sun
to guide us and warm us...

O God, heal us and your grieving world
of all that harms us.
By the power of your resurrection
restore us to new life,
set us on new paths,
bring us from darkness to light,
help us to choose hope,
and send us out to share
the light and hope of Easter
with the people who we care for,
whom we love and who love us.
Send us out and share with the new and old friends
who you have given to us through your risen son Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Blessing

Imaginative God, you smiled, and the sun burst through the shadows of chaos.
You laughed, and all that is good and beautiful was given shape by you.
Bless us now, and let us live dancing with joy, and with hallelujahs ringing in our hearts, to share
your justice, your love, your peace, and your praise. Amen.

Music