

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of April 2025

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Sunday 6th April 2025 – 5th Sunday in Lent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd James Pritchard

We have received generously from you, our God. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, may our voices pour out the oil of joy, may we pour out our worship generously, **Amen.**

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded (StF 455)

- 1 All my hope on God is founded;
 he doth still my trust renew.
 Me through change and chance he guideth,
 only good and only true.
 God unknown,
 he alone
 calls my heart to be his own.

- 2 Human pride and earthly glory,
 sword and crown betray our trust;
 what with care and toil we fashion,
 tower and temple, fall to dust.
 But God's power,
 hour by hour,
 is my temple and my tower.

- 3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
 deep his wisdom passing thought;
 splendour, light, and life attend him,
 beauty springeth out of nought.
 Evermore
 from his store
 new-born worlds rise and adore.

- 4 Daily doth the almighty giver
 bounteous gifts on us bestow;
 his desire our soul delighteth,
 pleasure leads us where we go.

Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from earth to God eternal
 sacrifice of praise be done,
 high above all praises praising
 for the gift of Christ his Son.
 Christ doth call
 one and all
 ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844–1930) *(alt.) based on* Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

A Prayer of Thanks:

Pause to think of the good things around us and the blessings we have received this week...

Lord, we thank you for the goodness we have seen around us this week: for kindness of friends and strangers; for signs of spring bursting forth in our gardens, parks, fields and hedgerows. We remember those special moments this week and give you thanks.

We thank you for all those people who have crossed our path this week.

We thank you for unexpected moments of goodness and joy, even in the midst of pain or sorrow.

Lord, we thank you for the things that enrich our lives - our favourite food, music, hobbies... We thank you for all the good things in our lives that we sometimes take for granted. Help us to see the worth and value in everything and everyone.

Generous God, we thank you for your many blessings. **Amen**

Hymn: To God be the glory, great things he has done! (StF 94)

1 To God be the glory, great things he has done!
 So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
 who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
 and opened the life-gate that all may go in:

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
and give him the glory — great things he has done!*

2 O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:

3 Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:

Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)

Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21 NRSV

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, ¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: ¹⁸ Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

²⁰ The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, ²¹ the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

At the end of this week's materials is a suggestion of a creative way of engaging with this passage, you could turn to that now, or use it at another point if you wish.

A Prayer of Confession

Loving God,

we are sorry we often don't trust that you can make things new, that you can change things for the better.

Forgive us for taking our eyes off you and yearning for worldly riches.

Forgive us for losing sight of your grace.

Jesus, we are sorry for investing in things that are not of you, believing and valuing worldly opinions and aspirations instead. We're sorry for taking our eyes off you and moving the goalposts. We're sorry for attempting to hide things from you. We know it is futile trying to be something we're not, as you know us inside out. You know the real us. You know our passions and what we truly value. And you accept us just as we are.

Holy Spirit, help us to put away everything that is not good for us, that works to take us further from you.

Holy God, forgive us and refresh us, help us focus on getting to know you better and mining your riches.

Salvation is ours through Christ, through him our sins are forgiven. Our past is behind us, we walk step-by-step in glorious freedom with Jesus, our Saviour. **Amen.**

Reading: John12 1-8 NRSV Updated

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him.

Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Reflection:

As we continue to journey through Lent we come to a bit of a turning point in the suggested readings. In today's gospel reading we are pointed fairly directly towards the cross, to the time when we remember Jesus' death and resurrection. There are big emotional themes in these days running up to Easter Sunday – love, passion, sacrifice, suffering, life and death. They are themes about what really matters most to us and our world. In today's Gospel, Mary recognises this and in one extravagant gesture, she emphasises the enormous importance of Jesus and what he is about to do.

³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair.

We are told the perfume was worth about 300 denarius, one was the average wage for a common soldier or unskilled labourer, so 300 is around a year's wages! Can you imagine giving your best friend some perfume worth a year's wage?

It might be worth us remembering that in the chapter prior to this we have Jesus declare that he is 'the resurrection and the life' and we also learn of the death of Lazareth, Mary's brother. John records how it is Mary who knelt at Jesus' feet and said to him, '*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*' In John 11:22 Jesus is deeply moved by Mary and performs this amazing miracle, raising Lazareth to life. The new things that are possible with God declared in Isaiah are seen loud and clear in Jesus' actions! When we remember all this, it is perhaps less surprising that Mary is willing to respond so generously, so lavishly, after all what an amazing thing Jesus did for her brother. All this is happening when the heat around Jesus is rising and the plot to kill him is being formed. Mary, it seems, either implicitly or explicitly, knows what lays ahead and does what she can, offers what she can, ahead of Jesus' death. Perhaps Mary bought the oil to prepare for Jesus' burial, but here in this moment cannot wait, maybe she wants to show him how valuable he is before he dies.

Soon after retirement a charity manager called John was diagnosed with terminal cancer. His friends decided to hold a 'living wake' for him while

he was still well enough to attend. There was lots of cake, as John used to buy cake for the team every Friday afternoon. Friends, family and colleagues shared their special memories of John and thanked him for the difference he had made to many peoples' lives through the work of the charity. John was also able to speak of his most precious memories, and the people and events he was thankful for. What a wonderful thing to be able to share something you are passionate about and to celebrate people who are special to you. How often do we lose track of who matters most to us, or what is really important, until it's too late?

In this gospel passage we find Mary like John's friends not waiting, but doing what she can here and now in the moment... Here Mary lovingly anoints Jesus. 'Anointing' doesn't just mean smearing oil on Jesus' feet; anointing usually refers to someone who is called for a special purpose – Mary, more than many others, seems to get what lays ahead for Jesus and marks it by her lavish anointing, an act that, in turn, points us to the generosity of Christ and his death on the cross. Here is a crucial moment and a lavish act of generous discipleship and here our eyes are led towards the cross.

Possible Questions to Ponder:

- What are you most passionate about, and why?
- What strikes you most about Mary's act of generosity and worship?
- What sacrifices are you prepared to make for your faith?

Poem: Pure Nard

A final time at Bethany in old, familiar company
Jesus, were your thoughts pierced through
with knowing what you had to do?

And did you clutch within your heart
a world about to break apart
or steady, with a conscious will, a brimming cup
so soon to spill?

Lazarus sat next to you so grateful, and yet
puzzled too the dark thoughts of his tomb

not quite extinguished by the rising light

While diligent Martha, unreserved
and practical as always, served her
living brother, sitting by the healer
who had let him die

and round the table, sharing food, those
dear disciples loved and known a band as
close as flesh and blood in whom
the kingdom seeds were sown yet no
companion understood the fullness of the fears you faced

until that generous sister
with a love learned from the master
poured out a salve so precious that it
seemed just like a waste.

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Prayers for Others:

*- Pause and draw to mind people, places and situations in need of prayer
this day...*

Loving God may your blessings be poured out generously on those who
need it at this time we pray, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: All I once held dear (StF 489)

1 All I once held dear,
 built my life upon,
 all this world reveres,
 and wars to own,
 all I once thought gain
 I have counted loss;
 spent and worthless now,
 compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.*

*You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

2 Now my heart's desire
 is to know you more,
 to be found in you
 and known as yours.
 To possess by faith
 what I could not earn,
 all-surpassing gift
 of righteousness.

3 Oh, to know the power
 of your risen life,
 and to know you in
 your sufferings.
 To become like you
 in your death, my Lord,
 so with you to live
 and never die.

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

A Call to Reflect and Remember:

As we journey towards Holy Week, like Mary's lavish act, Paul's words in his letter to the Philippians draw us towards Christ's death on the cross. Read these words and reflect on God's love and grace made known through Christ and his death on the cross.

Reading: Philippians 3:4-14 NRSV

⁴even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have

suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Hymn: When I survey the wondrous cross (StF 287)

- 1 When I survey the wondrous cross,
 on which the Prince of Glory died,
 my richest gain I count but loss,
 and pour contempt on all my pride.
- 2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
 save in the death of Christ my God;
 all the vain things that charm me most,
 I sacrifice them to his blood.
- 3 See from his head, his hands, his feet,
 sorrow and love flow mingled down;
 did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
 or thorns compose so rich a crown?
- 4 His dying crimson, like a robe,
 spreads o'er his body on the tree;
 then am I dead to all the globe,
 and all the globe is dead to me.
- 5 Were the whole realm of nature mine,
 that were an offering far too small;

love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all. Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Prayer:

Gracious God, thank you for pouring out your love so generously for us, help us journey towards the cross and to continue to walk with you in all the days ahead. **Amen.**

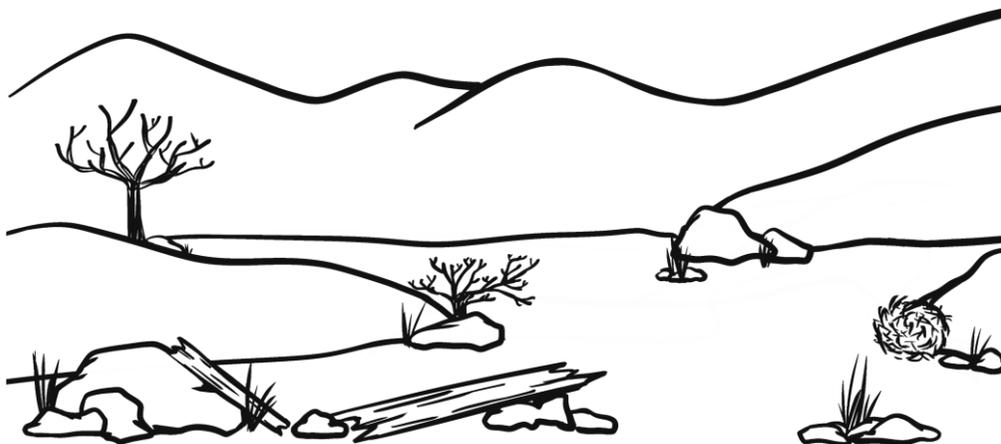
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Creative reflection on Isaiah 43:16-21

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? (vv18-19a)

Read or listen to someone else read the full text (Isaiah 43:16-21) a couple of times. While you do, **try to transform the picture** to be like the “new thing” Isaiah describes God doing.

What happens when a stream flows through a wasteland? Imagine what plants or animals might show up and **draw those** too.



Think or talk about which parts of your life (or perhaps another situation) feel like a desert at the moment.

What would it look like for God to do a new thing there?

Write or draw your own prayer in or around your picture: ask God to bring new life to areas that need it, in your life or in the world.

Scripture quotation taken from The Holy Bible, New International
Version® NIV



Sunday 13th April 2025 – Palm Sunday

Second Sunday of the Passion

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.

May you find it to be a time of blessing.

Call to Worship:

Come and give thanks to the Lord who is good: **His love lasts for ever!**

Give praise to the Lord who welcomes us: **His love lasts for ever!**

This is the day the Lord has made: **Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord: **His love lasts for ever! Amen.**

Hymn: All glory, laud and honour (StF262)

- 1 All glory, laud, and honour
to Thee, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring!
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and blessed One.
- 2 The company of angels
are praising Thee on high,
and mortal men and all things
created make reply.
The people of the Hebrews
with palms before Thee went;
Our praise and prayer and anthems
before Thee we present.
- 3 To Thee before Thy Passion
they sang their hymns of praise;
to Thee now high exalted

our melody we raise.
Thou didst accept their praises;
accept the prayers we bring,
who in all good delightest,
Thou good and gracious King.

4 All glory, laud, and honour
to Thee, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring!

St. Theodulph of Oriens (d. 821)
Translated by John Mason Neal (1811–1866)

Prayers of Praise and Adoration:

King of kings, yet servant of all,
We worship You.
Lord of lords, yet broken for all,
We praise You.
Giver of life, yet dying for all,
We honour You.
Ruler on high, yet least of all,
We acclaim You.
Crucified King,
Teach us what it means to love You, serve You,
Acknowledge You, proclaim You,
In thought and deed and word. **Amen.**

Prayers of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Dear Lord, hatred engulfed you, but you reacted with love.
Forgive us for when we've reacted badly in the face of animosity.
Forgive us when we let fear of what others think stop us
from doing Your will.
Lord, You came as a man of the people. Though you were without sin, you
did not look to be served but to serve.
Forgive us our pride. Help us to humbly follow You and to seek to serve
others, to the glory of Your name.

We have reason to celebrate.

Our blessed, sovereign Lord became human to bring about our salvation. Through His suffering on the Cross we are forgiven. **Amen.**

You may like to join in this modern version of the words of The Lord's Prayer ...

Parent God, we come before You in praise and wonder,

Imperfect as we are, we come to thank You for the week that is past; whether good, bad or indifferent, it has added to our experience of life and given us opportunity to encounter glimpses of You.

Your Kingdom come, Your will be done.

Attune our hearts to how Your spirit is moving in our community, how we can help build Your kingdom here and lift up those in our community who need to know Your love.

On earth, as it is in Heaven.

Keep us mindful of the needs of the planet, to be dutiful stewards of the environment so that we can encounter You in creation all around us.

Give us today our daily bread,

We are thankful for the food on our table and the nourishment of our souls. Keep us mindful of those who have not, and our hearts open to sharing what we have with those around.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

We regret all our mistakes. Help us to be compassionate towards those who have upset or offended us.

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.

Give us strength to reject temptation and protect us from all that would harm us.

We pray this for the glory of Your Kingdom. Amen.

Reading: Luke chapter 19 vs. 28 – 40 'THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY' NIV

Introduction:

Jesus finally reaches Jerusalem and arranges to enter the city on a donkey. As He joins the crowds of pilgrims arriving for the Passover festival, His disciples hail Him as 'the King who comes in the name of the Lord' – to the annoyance of the watching Pharisees.

²⁸ After Jesus had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As He approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' "

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as He had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

³⁴ They replied, "The Lord needs it."

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As He went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

⁴⁰ "I tell you," He replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Hymn: Make way, make way for Christ the King (StF 264)

1 Make way, make way, for Christ the King
 in splendour arrives;
 fling wide the gates and welcome Him
 into your lives.

*Make way (make way), make way (make way)
for the King of kings;
Make way (make way), make way (make way),
And let his Kingdom in.*

2 He comes the broken hearts to heal,
 the prisoners to free;
 the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,
 the blind shall see.

3 And those who mourn with heavy hearts,
 who weep and sigh,

with laughter, joy and royal crown
He'll beautify.

- 4 We call you now to worship Him
as Lord of all,
to have no gods before Him,
their thrones must fall!

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Reading: Luke chapter 22 v. 14 – chapter 23 v. 56 NIV

Introduction:

The set Gospel reading for today takes us through the second set of the Passion stories on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. As this is a lengthy reading, you may like to reflect on each story separately over the coming days. It covers horrors we may not wish to contemplate and shy away from but each is important and challenge us to take these last steps with Jesus. We read these stories with the foresight of Easter Day and the Resurrection, but for Jesus' first followers, they brought betrayal, denial and desolation. They did not dare to hope that this was anything other than the end..... However, it was only just the beginning.

The reading is divided into sections to make reading easier and each is followed by a reflection to help us as we consider **our** thoughts, feelings and emotions as we make **our** response to these events.

THE LAST SUPPER

¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and His apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the Kingdom of God."

¹⁷ After taking the cup, He gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes."

¹⁹ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. ²¹ But the hand of Him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. ²² The

Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays Him." ²³ They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

²⁴ Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵ Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. ²⁸ You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a Kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹ "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

³³ But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

³⁴ Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

³⁵ Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered.

³⁶ He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. ³⁷ It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment."

³⁸ The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords." "That is enough," He replied.

He rose from the table, laid aside his garments and taking a towel, tied it round Him.

Then He poured water into a basin and begun to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel.

You're not going to wash my feet.

you're not going to wash my feet!
I mean it and I won't let you.
It's not your job, such dirty work.
It's not your place to be seen doing what masters love and servants
loathe.
And I – we - have come to call you Master;
And you - **you** want to be our servant!
Oh, how humiliating!

You are the one we call our Lord.
You are the one on whose word all our words hang.
You are the one we'll always follow,
the one we will never reject, never betray, never deny.

Why empty yourself of dignity to go down on the ground like a slave?
If you're down on your knees won't the world walk on by,
thinking You feeble and weak?
Why not rule from the sky and stretch your arms round the world,
not my ankles?
You're not going to wash my feet.

Peter, this is what He must do.
And this is what you must let Him do.
To prevent it... is to pretend to be perfect,
and you are in need of as much washing as us all.

This, whom you call 'servant', is your Lord.
To be the Lord means to be the servant;
to do the dirty work and to do it in love.
And that is very costly, although you count it stupid.

For a good world, a man may lay down his life with pride;
but for a bad world and for people who reject, betray, deny, it is much
harder.

His power is in His weakness, and you may not know that today,
and you will not think it tomorrow, when from a Cross,
against the sky, He hangs helpless.
But this is the way the world is transformed....

By loving the unlovely, by dying for the lifeless,
by forgiving those, like you, whose hearts are too stubborn to see
what they are or know who He is.

Think not always to act, always to speak.
But first let your Lord do for you what you must do for each other.

JESUS PRAYS AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES (Luke 22:39-46):

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and His disciples followed Him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, He said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but Yours be done." ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

⁴⁵ When He rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, He found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ "Why are you sleeping?" He asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Sit here while I pray.
The sorrow in my heart is so great, it almost crushes me.
Here stay and keep watch with me.

"Father, I have shown your glory on earth; I have finished the work You gave me.
I have given my disciples your message and the world ... it's hated them.
Yet I don't pray that they may be taken out of the world.
I pray that they may be kept from evil.

Sleeping, Peter? Can you not even keep awake for an hour?

Father, I pray not only for my friends, but for all who believe their words.
I pray that they may be one, just as You and I are one.

Father, the world does not know You, but I know You and they know You.
So that the world may believe that You sent me, may they be one.

Peter, keep watch and pray, don't be drawn by temptation.

The spirit is willing, but, oh the flesh... the flesh is weak."

JESUS ARRESTED (Luke 22:47-53):

⁴⁷ While He was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss Him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

⁴⁹ When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And He touched the man's ear and healed him.

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for Him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?" ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour--when darkness reigns."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus.

When they heard what he had come for, they were greatly pleased.

"How much will you give me to betray him?"

There... I've said it, and now... I feel much better.

It's a weight off my shoulders, it's a burden off my mind,
it's a great relief.

Somebody had to handle the dirty goods.

He has to die - He said it Himself, I'm only helping Him on His way,
On to a Cross.

But who knows, maybe He needs this.

Maybe this will rouse Him to display all the power He's supposed to have.

Maybe He'll even say, "Thank you, Judas."

How much did you say? Is that all?

Is that all He's worth?

Thirty pieces of silver... Just enough to buy a piece of rope to hang myself
And a burial plot for my body.

PETER DISOWNS JESUS (Luke 22:54-62):

⁵⁴ Then seizing Him, they led Him away and took Him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with Him."

⁵⁷ But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know Him," he said.

⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with Him, for he is a Galilean."

⁶⁰ Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly.

It is cold.

Someone has built a large open fire to keep warm.

You are standing next to the fire.

A lot of people do the same.

Your mind is exploding with thoughts.

Your friend, Jesus, was just arrested.

You and His followers came to this place where He is being kept.

The crowd is restless, hostile even.

A woman glances over at Peter, a close friend of Jesus.

Stares at him. She points at him.

She whispers something to the woman next to her.

She knows who Peter is.

She walks over to Peter, her friend behind her.

She says, "You are one of His followers."

Peter jumps to his feet and denies it, "No, I am not.."

"Yes you are," she continues.

"I have seen you with that man they call Jesus."

Peter responds, "I am afraid you are mistaken."

She replies, "No, I am not, it is you."

"No," Peter says sternly, "Now get away from me."

He shoves her aside and walks away.

A rooster crows.

Look - Peter stopped in his tracks.

He also heard the rooster.

We remember Jesus' words at dinner.

Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed.

None of us, including Peter, thought that it could ever happen.

THE GUARDS MOCK JESUS (Luke 22:63-65):

⁶³ The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating Him. ⁶⁴ They blindfolded Him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" ⁶⁵ And they said many other insulting things to Him.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing Him. ¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked Him. Dressing Him in an elegant robe, they sent Him back to Pilate. ¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies.

¹³ Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined Him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against Him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, He has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish Him and then release Him." ¹⁷

¹⁸ With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

²² For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in Him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release Him."

²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that He be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their

demand.²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

"I just happened to be an execution duty.
We all take our turn. None of us like it.
You have to deal with women screaming,
children bawling and the odd drunk
who wants to challenge the victim to a fight.
Today was really unusual.
A lot of people just kept quiet.
The people who made the most noise were the priests and elders.
It was the 'important people'
those who normally kept back from executions
who were shouting abuse.
And I have to admit that I was tempted to join in
- just in case they thought I was on His side.
What can I say now?
Jesus....
I was only doing my job. I know You've been framed.
I know You shouldn't be up there.
But I can't take You down. I'm not my own boss.
Yet, this is a lame excuse.
I wonder how many other people won't help You,
Won't speak up for You, let the worst happen to You,
And then say,
"It's not my fault. It's got nothing to do with me. I was only doing my job."

THE CRUCIFIXION (Luke 23:26-43):

²⁶ As they led Him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for Him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰ Then they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the

hills, "Cover us!" ³¹ For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on His left. ³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at Him. They said, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One."

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered Him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."
"

⁴³ Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Why had God let it happen?

Why didn't He step in and do something?

What was He thinking of?

It seemed criminal, a stupid,
waste to let such a wonderful man die –
let alone to die like that!

Why that way, God, and not another?

Why not something less brutal, less awful, less messy?

Yet the strange thing is **He** never asked why,
not once in all the days I knew Him.

But He offered his life, freely, willingly, lovingly,

in the conviction that, through His dying, we might truly live.

JESUS' DEATH (Luke 23:44-49):

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

It was on the Friday that they ended it all.

Of course, they didn't do it one by one.

They weren't brave enough.

All the stones at the one time or no stones thrown at all.

They did it in crowds..... In crowds where you can feel safe

and lose yourself and shout things you would never do on your own,

and do things you would never do if you felt the cameras were watching you.

And He said nothing.

He took the insults, the bruises, the spit on the face,

The thongs on the back, the curses in the ears.

He took the sight of His friends turning away, running away.

And He said nothing.

He let them do their worst until the worst was done,

as on Friday they ended it all

JESUS' BURIAL (Luke 23:50-56):

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action.

He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵² Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³ Then he

took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the

rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

⁵⁵ The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

So there it is, the ugly shape of beautiful wood, rough hewn by human hands.

And there it is, a tight-shut tomb, a borrowed grave, sealed with stone and silence.

And there it is, your broken body, shrouded in linen, closed in darkness.

And somewhere stand your people, crying though tired of crying, the eyes sore and bloodshot, They will not sleep tonight.

And out in the streets, the children have stopped playing, the Sound of Music has gone sour, even the unlikely folk fidget and wonder.

Lord, where are you now?

Hymn: From heaven you came (StF 272)

1 From heaven you came helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God,
the Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

2 There in the garden of tears
my heavy load He chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' He said.

3 Come see His hands and His feet
the scars that speak of sacrifice,

hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

- 4 So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone Him,
Each other's needs to prefer
for it is Christ we're serving.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

God who has always been:

We lift up our broken world to You, acknowledging that so much has come
to pass that has destroyed, hurt and wounded.

We lift up to You those who are victims of war, of injustice, of
marginalisation.

We lift up to You the ways in which we dishonour Your creation by
prioritising greed and want over care for climate and each other.

And we ask You to transform our world, God; to make it holy.

God who is here with us now:

We lift up to You those who are unwell, those who are sad or lonely or
lost.

We lift up to You those in our community, those known to us, and those
known only to You, who are in need of Your love.

We ask You to bring peace, God; to bring healing and restoration.

God who goes ahead of us:

We lift up to You the parts of our world that are unfolding into something
beautiful;

Where there is joy, where there is dancing, where there is newness and
light, we give thanks.

We thank You, God, that you are at work in all of creation; that You are
working for good, even when we don't see it.

God, for Your goodness yesterday, today and forever, we give You praise.
Amen.

Hymn: Ride on, ride on in majesty (StF 265)

- 1 Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark, all the tribes 'Hosanna!' cry;

Your humble beast pursues its road
with palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die:
O Christ, Your triumphs now begin
O'er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
The wingéd squadrons of the sky
look down with sad wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Your last and fiercest strife is nigh;
the Father on His sapphire throne,
expects His own anointed Son.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
Bow Your meek head to mortal pain,
then take, O God, Your power and reign.

Henry Hart Milman (1791–1868)

Blessing:

Until we stand before Him, casting our crowns, lost in wonder, love and
praise,
Until then, we have much work to do, to build a Kingdom of love here on
earth.

Give us the courage this day and every day, O God, Amen

Some material is adapted from '*Roots for Churches* and '*Stages on the
Way*' – Wild Goose Worship

Sunday 20th April 2025 – Easter Day

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton

Opening words:

This is the day:

**when tears are wiped away,
shattered hearts are mended,
fears are replaced with joy.**

This is the day:

**when the Lord rolls away the stone of fear,
throws off death's clothes,
goes ahead of us into God's future.**

This is the day the Lord has made:

**death has no fear for us,
sin has lost its power over us,
God opens the tombs of our hearts
to fill us with life.**

This is the day – Easter Day!

Christ is risen!

Hallelujah!

Hymn: Christ the Lord is risen today (StF 298)

- 1 Christ the Lord is risen today; *Alleluia!*
All creation joins to say: *Alleluia!*
Raise your joys and triumphs high: *Alleluia!*
Sing you heavens; let earth, reply: *Alleluia!*
- 2 Love's redeeming work is done, *Alleluia!*
Fought the fight, the battle won; *Alleluia!*
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; *Alleluia!*
Christ has burst the gates of hell: *Alleluia!*
- 3 Lives again our glorious King; *Alleluia!*
Where, O death, is now your sting? *Alleluia!*
Once he died our souls to save; *Alleluia!*
Where's your victory, boasting grave? *Alleluia!*

4 Soar we now where Christ has led, *Alleluia!*
Following our exalted Head; *Alleluia!*
Made like him, like him we rise; *Alleluia!*
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: *Alleluia!*

5 King of Glory! Soul of bliss! *Alleluia!*
Everlasting life is this, *Alleluia!*
You to know, your power to prove, *Alleluia!*
Thus to sing, and thus to love: *Alleluia!*

Prayer:

Loving God,
we sing to you with cheerful voice,
and come before you and rejoice,
for now we know that you are God indeed:
maker of all, though and through creation.
We praise and adore you.

Loving God,
entering our humanity in Jesus,
living as us,
dying for us,
rising to life to confirm Easter's hope for the world.
We praise and adore you.

Loving God,
powerfully present in your Spirit,
drawing us to truth,
guiding us to light,
showing us the Way, Truth and Life for all time.
We praise and adore you.

Father, Son and Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
We praise and adore you.

Voices of Easter adapted from 'Easter according to John's Gospel' by Ruth Burgess.

Mary:

It was still dark when I got there.
He was dead – I knew that –
but I still wanted to be near him.

It has been a horrible death.
Hard – so hard – to watch
but we were there for him:
his mother, his aunt, me and another Mary
and John, the disciple that he loved.

We had heard him say it,
'*It is finished*' and then he was dead.

Finished – ended – over and still dark.

As the sun rose I saw that
the stone was no longer in front of his tomb.

And I ran.

I ran to find Mary, his mother, who was staying with John,
and Peter was there too.
And I told them that his body wasn't there.

Peter:

She told us - out of breath from running.
she told us - and we had to see for ourselves.

John ran faster than me.
He was fitter – younger – and he got there first.
He stood outside the tomb
looking – but not going in.

I caught up and I pushed past him.

The linen wrappings that Nicodemus
and Joseph had so tenderly wrapped around his body
lay on the floor

and the cloth they had tied around his head was there too rolled up, all by itself.

John came in and stood beside me -
he looked stunned,
the way he looked sometimes
when Jesus was explaining something to him.

What could we do?
Neither of us knew what was happening.

We came out of the cave and we went home.

Hymn: Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

1 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

2 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
 O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

3 Were you there when he rose to glorious life?
 Were you there when he rose to glorious life?
 O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
 Were you there when he rose to glorious life?

Voices of Easter.....

An angel:

We were standing in the tomb
where they had laid him
and the air was electric.

We had been sent there to meet Mary
and ask her a question
but she was still outside the tomb crying.
But we knew she would look in again soon and see us
and she did.

And we asked her,
'Woman, why are you crying?'
And she told us:
'They have taken the body of Jesus, my rabbi, away,
and I don't know where they've put him.'

We knew what had happened
but we couldn't tell her.

And, still crying she went out into the garden.

Mary:

I'd come back.

I knew John and Peter were way ahead of me
and by the time I reached the garden they'd gone.

I was alone.

I thought I'd have no tears left
but I was still weeping.....

When I looked again into the tomb I could see two angels
and they asked me why I was still crying.

They were angels – God's messengers – surely they knew why I was
crying!

I walked away from the tomb and I heard someone ask me a question.
It was a man – he had his back to me –
and he asked me who I was looking for.

I assumed he was the gardener
and I asked him if he had moved Jesus' body
and he turned round
and he said my name
'Mary'
and I knew.

I knew he was alive.

It wasn't the gardener – it was Jesus!

I wanted to hug him for ever and ever – to feel his strength, his love,

his kindness – to never let him go.

But he told me to go and find Peter and John and tell them what had happened and I did.

But I told Mary what had happened first for she was his mother.

Hymn: Low in the grave he lay (StF 305)

1 Low in the grave he lay;
Jesus, my Saviour,
waiting the coming day,
Jesus, my Lord:

*Up from the grave he arose,
with a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives for ever with his saints to reign:
He arose! He arose!
Alleluia! Christ arose!*

2 Vainly they watch his bed,
Jesus, my Saviour;
vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus, my Lord:

3 Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
he tore the bars away,
Jesus my Lord:

Voices of Easter....

Jesus:

It's strange
this body.
It feels like it's always done
but it's different.

I wanted to hug her
but I wasn't sure if I could.
Wasn't sure if she could hug me back.

But I could speak to her.
I could tell her how much I loved her
for her tears, her care, her wonder.

In the end I just said her name
and it was enough.

She recognised who I was
and she knew.

She knew that
our worlds had been turned upside down.

And we both recognised our own hesitancy,
our own shyness,
and our deep love for each other.

I think it may take
the disciples longer
to grasp what has happened.

But Mary knew
and she'll be my witness.

And one day, very soon,
my disciples will know too.

Narrator:

Mary wondered
And Mary met him
And Mary knew
And Mary whispered,
'Jesus is alive.'

The angels knew
For God had told them
And the angels whispered,
'Jesus is alive.'

John wondered
And John saw the tomb was empty

And John knew
And John whispered,
'Jesus is alive.'

We wonder
And we ask questions
And we can meet him
And we can whisper,
'Jesus is alive.'

It's Easter morning.
Forget the whispering.
Feel like shouting?
OK – let's do it.
On the count of three
Take a deep breath.....
One, two, three.....
JESUS IS ALIVE.

Prayer:

When people weep
because they are oppressed,
because they are destitute,
because they are being destroyed by warfare,
because all hope for the future lies dead,
Come, Risen Lord: **wipe away all tears.**

When people weep
because they are anxious and afraid,
because they are ill,
because they are racked with pain,
because someone they love has died,
Come, Risen Lord: **wipe away all tears.**

When people weep
because they are lonely,
because no one listens to them,
because people have been cruel,

because they long for death,
Come, Risen Lord: **wipe away all tears.**

When people weep
at the sins they have committed
at the emptiness of their lives
at their failures in loving
at the thought of death

Come, Risen Lord: **wipe away all tears.**

Risen Lord, come to us, even when we cannot recognise you through our tears, and call to us, that our lives may be transformed by Easter joy.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Thine be the glory (StF 313)

1 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.*

2 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 hast lost its sting:

3 No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life;
life is nought 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;

Closing words

Go in hope, the risen Lord goes before you.

Go in peace, the risen Lord goes with you.

Go in love, the risen Lord lives within you.

Sunday 27th April 2025 – Second Sunday of Easter

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

Call to Worship:

Here we stand at the door and knock: open our hearts to Your love.

Here we hesitate and doubt: open our minds to Your truth.

Here we hide in fear and pain: open our spirit to Your peace.

Here we gather in doubt and joy: open our lives to welcome all. **Amen.**

Hymn: Christ the Lord is risen today (StF 298)

- 1 Christ the Lord is risen today;
Alleluia!
All creation joins to say:
Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high;
Alleluia!
Sing, you heavens; let earth, reply:
Alleluia!
- 2 Love's redeeming work is done,
Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won;
Alleluia!
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Alleluia!
Christ has burst the gates of hell:
Alleluia!
- 3 Lives again our glorious King;
Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now your sting?
Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save;
Alleluia!

Where's your victory, boasting grave?

Alleluia!

4 Soar we now where Christ has led,

Alleluia!

Following our exalted Head;

Alleluia!

Made like Him, like Him we rise;

Alleluia!

Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies:

Alleluia!

5 King of Glory! Soul of bliss!

Alleluia!

Everlasting life is this,

Alleluia!

You to know, Your power to prove,

Alleluia!

Thus to sing, and thus to love:

Alleluia!

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Prayers of Praise and Adoration:

Living God, thank You for the great triumph of Your love celebrated at Easter, and for the way it transforms our attitude to our lives day by day. Thank You that when all seemed lost; all was in fact gained; that what appeared to be the close of a book was merely the opening of a new chapter.

Teach us that You are a God who is constantly able to turn the tables, to bring light out of darkness, hope out of despair and joy out of sorrow; a God who has destroyed the hold of sin and death and opened the way to life for all, lived now and always with You.

For the assurance that, whatever else may come to an end Your love will never finish, and so we offer You our thanks.

We praise You that the gospel speaks not just of what You have **done**, but also of what You are **doing**, not simply of the resurrection of Jesus long

ago, but equally, and all the more so, of His risen life and the new life He offers to us in turn.

Thank You for the way, through Him, You are able to transform every moment, bringing joy out of sorrow and hope out of despair.

Thank You for the knowledge that, whatever life may bring, You are with us, through Your Spirit, to lead us forward from darkness into light. Teach us to put our trust wholly in You, confident that, come wind or rain, sunshine or shadow, You will be there by our side, now and always.

Amen.

Prayers of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Lord God, You call us to be witnesses for You

but very often fear holds us back –

fear of speaking out and being made to look a fool, or, even worse, imprisoned, as many are in other countries.

Lord God, we are sorry when we allow our fears to dominate.

Sometimes, like Thomas,

we need to see evidence of Your promises before our fears subside.

Lord God, locked doors mean nothing to You but we often hang on to the key,

not wanting to face what lurks on the other side of the door;

sometimes unable to forgive ourselves for past actions.

Lord God, unlock any areas of our lives that we may not have dealt with.

Breathe on us afresh with Your peace, we pray.

Our Saviour hung on a tree, shed His blood and freed us from our sins.

Repentance and forgiveness are ours through His life blood

poured out for us. Receive what He died to give us.

Thank you, Saviour God.

You may like to join in the words of The Lord's Prayer Our Father, who art in heaven ...

Reading: Acts chapter 5 vs. 27 – 35

Introduction:

At their first appearance before the high priest's council, Peter and John were ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus (4:18). In prison for

ignoring this, an angel unlocked the doors, telling them to continue preaching in the Temple.

²⁷ Having brought the apostles, [from teaching outside the Temple courts] they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!" ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Saviour that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honoured by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men".

Pause for Thought: 'HERE ARE YOUR DISCIPLES'

Lord Jesus, here are Your disciples - Your wounded hands and feet in the world today are ours.

At times we have been the frightened ones, staying at a distance, worried about our safety or our reputations.

But You come close to us, bringing peace and challenge, unlocking our potential and setting us free.

At times we have been the doubting ones, when creeds conflict or certainty has evaded us.

But You come close and allow us to speak our minds, accepting us and setting us free.

At times we have been the confused ones feeling far from You with questions that don't have answers.

So, in the evening of Your resurrection we listen for Your voice.

The risen Christ says to us:

'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.'

When, like the apostles before the Sanhedrin we face opposition, questioning or ridicule, we ask:
Through our fear, through our doubt, through our confusion, may we continue Jesus' work
as we travel many roads, liberated and united by the love of the resurrected One.

Hymn: Alleluia, Alleluia (StF 295)

*Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to His name.*

- 1 Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
He is the King of creation:
- 2 Spread the good news o'er all the earth:
Jesus has died and has risen:
- 3 We have been crucified with Christ;
now we shall live forever:
- 4 God has proclaimed the just reward:
new life for all! Alleluia!
- 5 Come, let us praise the living God,
joyfully sing to our Saviour:

Donald Fishel (b. 1950)

**Reading: John Chapter 20 vs. 19 – 31 JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES
NIV**

Introduction:

The disciples, frightened by the discovery of the empty tomb and Mary's report that she has seen the Lord, are hiding in a house with locked doors. Jesus enters and shows them His wounds. Thomas does not see this and declares that he will not believe it is true unless he sees Jesus' wounds for himself. Despite the doors once again being locked, Jesus enters the house – this time, Thomas believes that He is the risen Lord.

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it."

²⁶ A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

JAMES RECALLS HIS EXPERIENCE

It wasn't just the *doors* that were locked –
it was our hearts as well,
shut tight against the Jews,
the future and the truth.

We were terrified that the Pharisees would come for us
as they'd come so recently for Jesus;
that they do to us what they'd done to Him.

We dreaded what lay ahead, convinced that, without Jesus, we could never cope.

And yes, the faith should have stood again within us after those reports of the empty tomb, the stone rolled aside, the Lord risen – we still couldn't quite accept it, none of us daring to believe in case it were some cruel delusion.

So we sat there, too shocked to face the past, too shaken to trust the future, too shattered to live in the present, each of us imprisoned by fear, grief and doubt.

Until, that is, as so often before, He was alive, victorious, by our side once more!

No door could keep Him out.

No grave could keep Him in.

And suddenly our hearts were open, set free to live again.

Whatever had been,

whatever was,

whatever would be,

Jesus was there too.

What more did we need to know?!

Reflection: 'WHAT A WEEK!'

What a week it had been! The joy of Palm Sunday soon faded into fear and confusion as the journey to Jerusalem reached its fulfilment. The disciples had gone through so many emotions: fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, despair, desolation. Had the past three years been a pipe dream - had they really listened to what Jesus said - or what they wanted to hear?

I wonder how much of that is reflected in our lives, in our faith and experiences?

That first resurrection evening finds the disciples locked behind closed doors for they were so afraid. Despite there being no evidence – there were rumours that the Jewish leaders would be searching for them too. Would they suffer the same fate as Jesus? But there were always rumours. It's always the way wherever there is conflict between rival groups and

fear escalates - reason flies out of the window. Many of us will find it easy to identify with those disciples. There is so much fear in our society - which is often fed by rumours. Bad news is good news for the media which feeds on many people's fear. One reason the disciples were hiding behind locked doors was because of the proliferation of rumours.

Another reason they may have been behind locked doors was because their faith was temporarily confused. These men were not religious scholars, but they would have been familiar with the Psalms - especially Psalm 23. They would be familiar with Elijah, Moses, and other heroes of the Old Testament. They had believed the promise of Jesus that He was the Rock of their Salvation who would never forsake them, but the faith that had sustained them so far had been shaken. Where was Jesus when they needed Him now, despite the fact that He had repeatedly told them never to be afraid? Someone has noted that there are 366 "Fear not" verses in the Bible – one for every day and an extra one for leap year. How much of that had the disciples taken in. A time of crisis had seemed to rob them of their faith. It's a common situation – even when we know that faith is our best ally. When we trust in a good and just God we never lose hope. It has been said that the opposite of fear is faith, but at this moment faith was raw.

Another reason the disciples could be hiding behind closed doors was because they felt abandoned. There was something about the presence of Jesus that gave them a sense of calm even in the presence of imminent danger. Remember the time He calmed the storm and walked out on the water to the boat where they were huddled. What were the first words He spoke? "Fear not. It is I." But where was He now? Crucified. An empty tomb. Absent from them in flesh and spirit. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Would they ever see Him again?

The answer was a resounding '**YES!**' Jesus can penetrate even the closed doors of our lives. Jesus came and stood among them and what were His first words: "Peace be with you!". Their paralysing fears were transformed into belief and confidence that they would use to unlock the doors and windows and go out into the streets to change the world.

But someone was missing – Thomas. He was out and about in the city, possibly on an errand, buying food for the group or communicating with their families, or even hiding somewhere on his own to avoid being associated with the others. When they eventually got together he was told how Jesus appeared to them in the closed room. What was his response: ‘I don't believe it. I need proof.’

He earned the name of ‘doubting Thomas’ when in reality, he was one of the greatest believers of all. ‘Thomas’ was not actually a name - it simply meant ‘The Twin’. There are all kinds of speculation as to who his twin was but popular belief suggests that he lost his brother at an early age - a blow from which he never quite recovered. So, the death of Jesus shattered Thomas’ faith. All hope had gone. He’d found Jesus’ teaching about the resurrection too good to be true. He simply couldn't believe the second-hand information he got from the others after the event.

A week later, when Thomas was with the group, Jesus appeared to them again with His customary greeting of “Peace be with you”.

Jesus seems to have had infinite patience with Thomas - perhaps He had not forgotten that Thomas was the only one who wanted to go with Him when Lazarus died. And maybe Jesus remembered that Thomas’ inquiry at the Last Supper opened the door for Him to teach them He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. So Jesus never lost patience with Thomas. Did Jesus value honest doubt more than blind belief? Although Jesus invited Thomas to touch Him, there is no record that he actually did. Merely meeting the Master was sufficient to convince him. He had met the risen Christ to whom his response was “My Lord and my God.” [v.28.]

Author Leslie Flynn tells the story of a small boy being raised by his grandmother. One night, the house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to rouse the boy from sleep to rescue him was overcome by smoke and fumes and died in the fire. A crowd gathered round the house as they heard a child's voice crying out for help. The house was a wall of flames and no one knew what to do. Suddenly, a man pushed through the crowd and began climbing an iron drain pipe which ran to the roof. The pipe was hot from the fire but he made it to an upstairs window. He crawled through and found the boy. With the crowd cheering encouragement, the

man climbed back down the drain pipe with the boy on his back and his arms around his neck.

A few weeks later, a public meeting was held to determine in whose custody the boy would be placed. Each person wanting to adopt him was allowed to make a brief statement. The first man was a farmer who promised he would give the boy a good home, farm life and a trade. Next was a school teacher who promised a good education. Finally, a banker spoke up, promising a comfortable home and secure future. The presiding officer looked round and asked if anyone else would like to speak. From the back row, a man rose and said: "These people can offer all the things I can't. All I can offer is my love." Then he slowly removed his hands from his coat pockets. A gasp went up from the crowd because his hands were terribly scarred from climbing up and down the hot pipe. The boy recognised him as the one who had saved his life and ran into his waiting arms. Everyone simply sat down. It was obvious what the decision would be. The scarred hands proved that this man had given everything.

All it took was for Thomas to see the scarred hands to know that he was in the presence of God Himself in the person of Jesus. I wonder what that story says to you? Who would you have chosen? One who could give you everything the world could offer or the one who could give you pure love?

Can we find a greater love than in Him who gave everything for us? When troubles and difficulties cloud our vision of the goodness of God, we need to draw closer to the Saviour. Faith on which we can depend for a lifetime is not a faith that has never experienced doubts. Rather, it is a faith that constantly searches and seeks, is always looking towards Jesus, trusting even in the most testing circumstances. There, in the midst of them stands Jesus saying, "Peace be with you. Do not be doubting, but believe. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." That's His promise for us - we are blessed, for in believing, we have pure love and life in His name.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You that you meet us day by day, just as you met Your disciples in the days following Your resurrection.

We thank You that Your victory of good over evil, of love over hate, of life over death continues to make such a difference to our lives, just as it did to theirs.

We thank You that for us too You turn weakness into strength, fear into confidence, and doubt into faith.

We praise You that for each of us there is always the assurance of a new beginning when it seems like the end, new hope where there seems only despair. **Amen.**

Hymn: This joyful Eastertide (StF 314)

1 This joyful Eastertide,
what need is there for grieving?
Cast all your cares aside
and be not unbelieving:

*Come, share our Easter joy
that death could not imprison,
nor any power destroy,
our Christ, who is arisen!*

2 No work for Him is vain,
no faith in Him mistaken,
for Easter makes it plain
His Kingdom is not shaken:

3 Then put your trust in Christ,
In waking and in sleeping.
His grace on earth sufficed;
He'll never quit his keeping:

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You are alive! We praise You for the glory of Your resurrection which means that we will never be separated from You. We pause for a moment to remember times when we have known Your presence in our lives this week.

Help us to look for signs of You in everything we do, wherever we go and whoever we meet this week. Keep us focussed on You, our risen triumphant Lord. Help us to kneel with Thomas and say, 'My Lord and my God'.

Lord Jesus, even when we don't have your physical presence with us:
help us to understand the reality.

Lord Jesus, Thomas needed to see the wounds in Your hands and side to know that You really had risen. We thank you that those scars demonstrate to us that You are a wounded God who therefore understands all our sorrows and suffering. We know that You have gone before us into the darkest places. We lift to You now all the places in our world that are suffering. We pray for countries still in the grip of war; we pray for the victims of climate change. In the silence we bring to You any other places of pain in our world.

Lord Jesus, Your wounds remind us that You are there and that You care: **help us to care for them too.**

Lord, we know that when You stretched your arms out on the Cross it was to show love for the whole world. Everyone matters to you. Everyone is within the realm of Your love. Everyone is loved equally by You. We particularly pray for refugees and all those fleeing persecution. We pray for compassion to all those who are seeking safety and stability in our country. We pray for people that the world seems to have forgotten: the lost and alone; the housebound; those in hospital for many weeks. We pray for children living on the streets; those in the care system; those who feel unloved.

Lord Jesus, Your outstretched arms tell us that You love the whole world: **help us to love everyone too.**

Lord, You came into that upper room, into a place full of fearful people and brought the beauty of Your peace. We pray for all those we know who need Your peace at the moment: those who are sick; those who are anxious and troubled; those who are sad or grieving; those who are dying; those who are facing exams soon; those who are afraid.

Lord Jesus, breathe Your peace deep into their hearts: **and fill them with the knowledge of Your presence.**

Lord, You did not want Your disciples to keep the good news of Your rising to themselves. You said to them: 'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.' Help us not to be afraid to tell our family and friends about You. Show us who to talk to and how to show Your love to those around us: at work, at school, in our streets and in our homes. We pray for all those we know who are struggling to believe that You really are alive and active in

the world. Help us to share with them what we know about You and help us to **show** them Your reality by living and loving as You did.

Lord Jesus, You give us Your peace and love:

send us out to take Your love and peace to others around us.

Lord Jesus, as we start a new week, take us out of our upper rooms and into the world to live and breathe Your presence. Go before us into every situation we face and help us to know that You are really there.

Thank You, Lord, for rising again for us:

and filling our hearts with joy. Amen

Hymn: Christ is alive! Let Christians sing (StF 297)

1 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.

The Cross stands empty to the sky.

Let streets and homes with praises ring.

Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

2 Christ is alive! No longer bound

to distant years in Palestine,

but saving, healing, here and now,

and touching every place and time.

3 In every insult, rift and war,

where colour, scorn or wealth divide,

Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,

and lives, where even hope has died.

4 Women and men, in age and youth,

can feel the Spirit, hear the call,

and find the way, the life, the truth,

revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

5 Christ is alive and comes to bring

good news to this and every age,

till earth and sky and ocean ring

with joy, with justice, love, and praise.

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Blessing:

Let us go out with laughter to spread God's joy.

Let us go out with passion to spread God's truth.

Let us go out with compassion to spread God's healing.

Let us go out with love to spread God's peace. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from '*Roots for Churches*'.

Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648 e-mail: northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk) know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.