

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of April 2026

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Sunday 5th April 2026 – Easter Day

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Words:

On this glorious Easter day, let us celebrate once again that the tomb is empty,
that Jesus is alive and that, even in dramatic scenes of noise and confusions,
he greets us with words of comfort and joy.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Hymn: Christ The Lord Is Risen Today (StF 298)

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!*

Love's redeeming work is done, *Alleluia!*

Fought the fight, the battle won; *Alleluia!*

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; *Alleluia!*

Christ hath burst the gates of hell: *Alleluia!*

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!*

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!*

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:

Prayer:

God of the new day,
turn our sorrow into joy
and our mourning into dancing;
take our heavy burdens from us;
free us from all that holds us back
and crushes our spirit.
Good Friday spoke of darkness,
but Easter resounds with light and love and forgiveness.
So, to you we turn,
alive in Christ and renewed by your Spirit.
Amen

Reading Matthew 27: 57 - 28: 10 NLT

The burial of Jesus: As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

The guard at the Tomb: The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first."

Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

The Resurrection: Early on Sunday morning as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."

The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."

Hymn: He Has Risen (StF 302)

*He has risen, he has risen,
He has risen,
Jesus is alive.*

When the life flowed from his body,
seemed like Jesus' mission failed.
But his sacrifice accomplished,
victory over sin and hell.

He has risen.....

In the grave God did not leave him,
For his body to decay;
Raised to life, the great awakening,
Satan's power he overcame.

He has risen.....

If there were no resurrection,
we ourselves could not be raised;
but the Son of God is living,
so our hope is not in vain.

He has risen.....

When the Lord rides out of heaven,
mighty angels at his side,
they will sound the final trumpet,
from the grave we shall arise.

He has risen.....

He has given life immortal,
we shall see him face to face;
through eternity we'll praise him,
Christ, the Champion of our faith.

He has risen.....

Reflection:

When a colleague asked me on the phone “What are you planning for your Easter service this year?” I was actually sat at my desk thinking about the various situations around the world – Gaza; Iran and the Middle East; continued famine in Sudan; people around the globe still trying to rebuild their lives after natural disasters; those who I know who are struggling with pain and illness.

At the moment it feels like a world where uncertainty and bewilderment seemingly face us every day. A world that so often causes me to wonder about humanity and to think about what a strange place it is! And yet amidst the uncertainty and bewilderment there is one thing I am absolutely sure of, and today more than ever, – CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

I believe in the resurrection and today, perhaps more than ever before, I need to proclaim that! And I believe in the resurrection for three reasons:

Firstly, because someone told me about it and the first ones to do that in terms of history were the disciples in their gospel accounts. Left behind with the other friends and followers of Jesus following the crucifixion, stunned and shaken and not knowing what to think or what to do. (That sounds familiar!)

Secondly, I believe in the resurrection because it has stood the test of time. Since the day it happened it has been talked about in all parts of the

world by people of all backgrounds and all walks of life. And as long as there is life on earth there will be people talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And thirdly, I believe in the resurrection because I have experienced it. The disciples couldn't explain what had happened, they didn't understand, but having seen Jesus die they then experienced him alive and present with them. And having seen it they put their own lives at risk to share the experience with others. I have seen people's lives changed by Jesus. I have known my own life changed by Jesus. I can't explain it, I don't fully understand it, but I believe in the resurrection because I have experienced it.

Hymn: I Know That My Redeemer Lives (StF 303)

I know that my Redeemer lives -
what joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
he lives, my everlasting Head!
He lives my everlasting Head.

He lives, to bless me with his love;
he lives, to plead for me above;
he lives, my hungry soul to feed;
he lives, to help in time of need.
He lives, to help in time of need.

He lives, and grants me daily breath;
he lives, and I shall conquer death;
he lives my mansion to prepare;
he lives and leads me safely there.
He lives and leads me safely there.

He lives, all glory to this name;
he lives, my Saviour, still the same;
what joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!
I know that my Redeemer lives!

Centrality by Pat Marsh

Lord, it's far from easy
to explain
to those who do not know you
the absolute centrality
of the cross
within my life,
indeed, from time to time
my logical-thinking, articulate brain
struggles with that truth.

It's only
in my heart knowledge,
my deep
gut-feeling knowing,
that I recognise
beyond all chance of doubt
that Jesus Christ
died
for me;

a loving man of peace,
incapable of wrong,
nailed to a cross as a common thief
in that once and for all
death,
that redeeming act of love:

central

to the purpose of his life,
to the future of the world.

Prayer:

Risen Lord, we pray that the Church may proclaim with joy
the promise of hope to be found in you;
may our lives testify to the truth of the Resurrection;
and in these difficult times broaden our vision

and help us to see what is possible through new life in you.

Risen Lord, we pray for the world in which we live;
for those who lead, and take decisions on behalf of us all,
for those who follow, for those who are coerced,
and for those who have no voice of their own.
May mercy and justice, compassion and integrity
prevail in all things and may your will be done.

Risen Lord, we pray for those who are finding life overwhelming;
for those who are troubled and feeling insecure;
for those who are finding it hard today to rejoice in the good news of
Easter.

We pray for all who are sick or in pain, all who are grieving and those who
are struggling to find ways of giving comfort and support.

Risen Lord, bring your healing and, in you, may we all find the resources
we need to cope with the uncertainty and suffering around us and the
grace to carry one another's burdens in love.

We offer our prayers in the name of your Son, our risen Lord and Saviour,
Jesus Christ.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Gnarled Old Trees by Pat Marsh

Gnarled old trees
lie broken
and dead,
struck down in their prime,
no longer bearing fruit
or growing
through the cycle of the seasons.

Yet in their brokenness
is beauty,

timeless
weathered out beauty.

It was their time to die,
for in their dying
they sustain the life of others.

A honeycomb grows
deep inside the hollow,
bringing sweetness to the death.

Butterflies dance
around the textured bark.

Lichens and mosses
root in the crevices;
new life
where once the sap did flow.

Heavenly dragonflies
hover.

Beauty from brokenness.....
Life from death....

Hymn: Thine Be The Glory (StF 313)

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-cloths 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 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:

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*

Closing Prayer:

Thank you, Lord,

for this wonderful, hopeful day.

Thank you that you are alive and with us
in all the celebrations and challenges of life.

Go with us now as we enjoy our Easter celebrations
and hold us as we face challenges ahead.

May we share your good news and blessing
with all those we meet this week.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Sunday 12th April 2026 – The Second Sunday of Easter

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

Come and know the Lord your God.
Come and know the joy of your God.
Come and know the love of your God.
Come and know by faith alone

Hymn: Come Now Is The Time To Worship (StF 24)

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God, Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those
Who gladly choose You no.

Come, now is the time to worship...

Opening Prayers:

God unseen, yet seeing all,
knowing all of us, loving all of us:

we bring our adoration.

Jesus, making God known to us
in your coming among us:

we bring our adoration.

Holy Spirit, drawing us together
in this act of worship:

we bring our adoration.

Lord, in some traditions, today is known as Low Sunday,
and we confess that is how we often feel
after the celebration of Easter.

We love the holidays, the days of feasting and joy
when we share our faith together.
Remind us that we are drawn together
in knowing you better,
through the companionship of one another
travelling together in the ordinary every day
as well as the celebratory holy days. **Amen.**

Hymn: All I Once Held Dear (StF 489)

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

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
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

John 20.19-31

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, ^[a] Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he

had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, ^[b] was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon:

Most of us are probably familiar with the phrase ‘Fake news’. How do we decide what is true and what has been manipulated and presented as the truth – but isn’t?

The truth of the Easter story comes by way of testimony, starting with Mary Magdalene who finds the tomb empty and speaks to Jesus in the garden. Would she, a woman, be believed? In the time of Jesus, that was unlikely – women were generally of little status; but Jesus called her name and showed her he had indeed risen.

Then there was the testimony of the disciples locked in a room, afraid and disheartened. Jesus appeared to them, letting them see his hands and side, offering Peace and breathing the Holy Spirit on them. Their joy at being in his physical presence encouraged them and dispelled their fear.

Thomas perhaps represents many who find it difficult to believe unless they see it for themselves. His scepticism contrasts with the faith of the others, but is a common trait that many of us will share. Yet, Thomas too came to understand and believe.

Out into the wider community, as the weeks and months move on, there is the testimony of Peter and the apostles talking to the people of Jerusalem. They testified because they were there. Their eyewitness account of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and of his appearing to them after his death, was real and personal; it could be recounted with enthusiasm and confidence.

There is evidence in the behaviour of the disciples who changed from being fearful followers locked away, to talking and telling anyone they meet. They had been encouraged. They had received the blessing of Jesus and the Spirit had been breathed on them.

There is evidence of the longevity of the story as it has been preached in churches down the centuries and is still real to people today. Surely 'fake news' would have been found out by now.

Then there is the effect of the story on some who hear it and just know that they know. An inner realisation of truth, a faith that cannot be explained – but is real. As Jesus says to Thomas, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' For hundreds of years Jesus has not been seen physically, but people trust and believe, recognising the values he taught and accept them for themselves.

So how do we measure truth? How do we decide fake news or living reality? On what is our faith built? Maybe on a story – but more than a story. A living, life-giving relationship with Jesus who offers us his Peace and his Spirit.

Hymn: I Know That My Redeemer Lives (StF 303)

I know that my Redeemer lives;
what comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head.

He lives to bless me with His love,
He lives to plead for me above,
He lives my hungry soul to feed,
He lives to help in time of need.

He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same.
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives,
"I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Intercessions:

Lord Jesus, we come to you today full of the thoughts of the week that has just passed – a week when your disciples had such a rollercoaster of emotions as they heard that you were alive; doubted the news of their friends; saw you for themselves and experienced your risen presence. As we think, in the stillness, of the week we have had we also acknowledge times of joy; confusion; sorrow; disbelief.

We bring our emotions and experiences to you now. Help us to see them with your eyes. Help us to step forward from this moment with renewed understanding of who you are and who you call us to be.

Lord, lead us forward:

lead us closer to you.

We pray today for our world. We pause for a moment to consider all the places that we have heard about in the news this week.

peace to the confused disciples in the upper room, yet the world is still such a place of strife. Help us to breathe deeply of your peace and learn to be peacemakers ourselves wherever we are.

Lord, lead us forward:

lead us closer to you.

Lord Jesus, the comforter, we pray for all those we know who are sick, sad or sorrowful today. We pause to name them out loud or in our hearts.

Lord, we saw your love and compassion as you wept at the death of your friend, so we ask you to come especially close to these people we have named. Help them to know that your arms of love are wrapped around them. And help us to be bringers of comfort in our places of learning, work or recreation this week.

Lord, lead us forward:

lead us closer to you.

Lead us to the brightness and assurance of your resurrected glory.

Amen.

Hymn: A Charge To Keep I Have (StF 658)

A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.

To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfil:
Oh, may it all my powers engage
To do my Master's will!

Arm me with jealous care,
As in Thy sight to live;
And O Thy servant, Lord, prepare
A strict account to give!

Help me to watch and pray,
And on Thyself rely,
Assured, if I my trust betray,
I shall forever die.

Closing Prayer:

Dear God,
thank you that we can know you
and that we know you in different ways.
Help us to know you more as we go out
and share your love with all we meet.

Amen.

Sunday 19th April 2026 – The Third 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:

Arms outstretched in welcome, nail-scarred hands open to greet us, we meet with the Risen Lord to worship and be fed. Let us leave behind all that would hinder our meeting with Him and rejoice in His presence.

Amen.

Hymn: 'ALLELUIA, ALLELUIA' (StF 295)

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

Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
He is the King of creation:

Spread the good news o'er all the earth;
Jesus has died and has risen:

We have been crucified with Christ;
now we shall live forever:

God has proclaimed the just reward:
new life for all! Alleluia!

Come, let us praise the living God,
joyfully sing to our Saviour:

Donald Fishel (b. 1950)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Into the darkness of our world, Your resurrection brought light.

Lord, we rejoice.

Into the despair of our world, Your resurrection brought hope.

Lord, we rejoice.

Into the emptiness of our world, Your resurrection brought purpose.

Lord, we rejoice.

Into the enslavement of our world, Your resurrection brought liberty.

Lord, we rejoice.

Into the sorrow of our world, Your resurrection brought joy.

Lord, we rejoice.

Into the brokenness of our world, Your resurrection brought healing.

Lord, we rejoice.

Love conquered hatred, good, evil, and death.

Lord, we rejoice.

Risen Lord, with hearts ablaze, filled with praise and wonder, we celebrate the truth that death is not the end;

that You rose from the tomb, opening the way to life for all.

With a song on our lips, heartfelt hymns of joy and thanksgiving, we celebrate the fact that love is stronger than hatred, good greater than evil,

and light mightier than darkness.

With laughter in our eyes, sparkling with faith and hope,

we celebrate the proof that sorrow will turn to joy,

hurt to wholeness and defeat to victory.

With gratitude deep within, filling body, mind and spirit,

we celebrate the assurance that Your Kingdom will never end,

Your purpose never fail, Your love never fade and Your mercy never be exhausted.

Gladly we worship You. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

All-seeing, all-knowing, and ever-present God,

You understand how easily we are caught up

by life's cares, spiralling into despair and distance.

Yet in Your grace, O Lord, You forgive us and walk the way with us, welcoming us back into Your presence.

You feed our souls with comfort and hope,

teaching us to see life in a new light. **Amen.**

Hymn: Listening God (StF 524) (Tune is the same as StF 306)

Listening God, You hear us when we cannot speak,
when despair and turmoil leave us faint and weak.
In love You call us back to You again
and Your grace reminds us how You feel our pain.

Searching God, You find us when we go astray,
as self-centred living takes us from Your way.
In love You seek us, show us what we've lost,
and Your tears remind us what forgiveness cost.

Suffering God, You lift us from our deepest grief,
when emotion blinds us to our own belief.
In love You touch us with Your nail-torn hands
and Your wounds remind us why You understand.

Risen God, You show us love too strong for death,
evil deeds defeated by Your living breath.
In love You teach us never to despair,
Your new life reminds us, hope is always there.

Marjorie Dobson (b. 1940)

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

Reading: 1 Peter 1 vs. 17 – 23 NSRV

Introduction:

Exiled, marginalised believers live in an often-hostile world. But their experience of the word of God brings them into the new reality of the resurrection. Freed from their old ways, they have been born into the world of faith, hope and heartfelt mutual love (vv.21-22). They are safe in the community of believers, who trust God as their heavenly 'Father' (v.17). They owe this new-found security to the surprising grace of the crucified and risen Jesus. Notice how the horror of Christ's crucifixion is re-framed in verse 19: it is 'precious... without defect or blemish'. Similarly, the very word of God they live by has an 'imperishable...living and enduring' quality (v.23), very different from the futility of their old life (v.18). These words nourish troubled times with Easter hope.

Be Holy

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the One who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through Him you have come to trust in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

Reading: Luke chapter 24 vs. 13 – 35 NSRV

Introduction:

Two disciples walk back from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. They are in despair about the death of Jesus. Jesus appears and walks beside them, but they do not recognise Him. He teaches them from the Scriptures, and they see who He is when He breaks bread with them. The Gospel passage prompts questions about how we know Jesus: Cleopas and his friend only recognised Jesus when He blessed and broke bread. This act, whether eucharistic or in everyday hospitality, is profound. This week, we explore knowing Jesus in breaking bread and hospitality and consider the stories Jesus was telling before they recognised Him.

On the Road to Emmaus

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.

¹⁷ And He said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose

name was Cleopas, answered Him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

¹⁹ He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be condemned to death and crucified Him.²¹ But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,²³ and when they did not find His body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see Him.”

²⁵ Then He said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?”²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the Scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, He walked ahead as if He were going on.²⁹ But they urged Him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So He went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road, while He was opening the Scriptures to us?”

³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the Eleven and their companions gathered together.³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and He has appeared to Simon!”³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Hymn: On The Day Of Resurrection (StF 307) (Alternative tune All for Jesus (StF 341))

On the day of resurrection
to Emmaus we return;
while confused, amazed, and frightened,
Jesus comes to us, unknown.

Then the stranger asks a question,
“What is this which troubles you?”
Meets us in our pain and suffering:
Jesus walks with us, unknown.

In our trouble, words come from Him:
burning fire within our hearts
tells to us the Scriptures’ meaning.
Jesus speaks to us, unknown.

Then we near our destination.
Then we ask the stranger in,
and He yields onto our urging;
Jesus stays with us, unknown.

Day of sorrow is forgotten
when the guest becomes the host.
Taking bread and blessing, breaking,
Jesus is Himself made known.

Opened eyes, renewed convictions,
journey back to scenes of pain;
telling all that Christ is risen.
Jesus is through us made known.

Michael Peterson

EASTER EVENING

As we walked home at close of day,
a stranger joined us on our way.
He heard us speak of one who’d gone
and when we stopped, He carried on.

‘Why wander further without light?

Please stay with us this troubled night.
We've shared the truth of how we feel
and now would like to share a meal.'

We sat to eat our simple spread,
Then watched the stranger take the bread;
And, as He said the blessing prayer,
we knew that someone else was there.

No stranger He; it was our eyes;
which failed to see, in stranger's guise,
the Lord who, risen from the dead,
met us when ready to be fed.

From 'Stages on the Way' Wild Goose Worship

Reflection:

Eight year old Henry got up one morning with a specific plan for the day. He wanted to find God. He thought it might be a long trip so he went prepared with a packed lunch - four packets of Kit Kats and two cans Cola. He set out on his journey and after a while came to a park. On one of the benches sat an elderly lady watching the pigeons. Feeling a little tired, Henry went and sat beside her on the bench and watched the pigeons too. He soon felt hungry and pulled out a Kit Kat. As he ate it, he noticed the lady watching him so he offered her one. She accepted gratefully and smiled at him. He thought she had the most beautiful smile in the world. Wanting to see it again, he opened a can of Cola and offered her the other one. Once again, she smiled that beautiful smile.

For a long time, the two sat on the park bench eating Kit Kats and drinking Cola, smiling at each other and watching the pigeons. Neither said a word. Finally, Henry realised it was getting late and he needed to go home. He got up to leave, took a few steps, turned back and gave the lady a big hug. Her smile was brighter than ever before.

When he arrived home, his mother noticed that he was happy, but strangely quiet. "What did you do today?" she asked. "Oh, I had lunch in the park with God," he said. Before his mother could reply, he added, "You know, she has the most beautiful smile in the world."

Meanwhile, the lady left the park and returned home. Her son noticed something different about her. “What did you do today, mum?” he asked. “Oh, I ate Kit Kats and drank Cola in the park with God. You know, God's a lot younger than I imagined.”

Well, a simple story, nothing unusual. Two people sitting together, sharing a simple snack. No need for conversation, just enjoying each other's company. Yet each recognised something in the other that gave them the feeling they had encountered the presence of God.

Luke recounts the occasion where two followers of Jesus were walking back home from Jerusalem on the evening of the resurrection. They had probably been to share in the Passover and then witness the horror of the crucifixion. As they made their way, discussing the news they had heard they became aware that they had been joined by a stranger who noticed that the couple were totally dejected. He joined in the conversation, inviting them to explain why they were so troubled. They shared in great detail all the events that had happened over the weekend. They had hoped that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel. In view of His popularity, power and authority from God, His followers fully expected He should triumph over the religious authority in Jerusalem and overpower the Roman rule. Israel would at last be free but now that Jesus had been crucified and buried, it seemed all had been a pipe dream. They knew the facts so well - but only as events - not as experience. They shared all they knew with this stranger who they assumed had been a visitor and was unaware of what had happened. The confusion is compounded by the strange report of a group of women who claimed they had found the tomb empty and had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive. But who would believe them? Women of first century Palestine had little credibility. Yet had they listened to Jesus' words, they would have understood and believed what the women had said. This is why they still unrecognised Jesus took them to task! His followers were slow in believing all that the prophets had spoken [v.25] and remembering His teaching about the necessity of His suffering [v.26]. Then Jesus, beginning with Moses explained to them what was said of Him in the Scriptures [v.27]. Still, the penny hadn't dropped! As they reached home, Jesus went to continue His journey but as night was falling, they offer Him

the hospitality of a meal and a bed for the night and Jesus gratefully accepted. As they sat together sharing food, Jesus took the bread, broke it and gave it to them. Then, they knew - this was no stranger - it was Jesus. The eyes were opened – an expression we should understand as *‘God opened their eyes.’* The purpose of His appearance was accomplished. Jesus slipped away from their sight. Then, the knowledge became the experience. They felt Jesus’ presence, like fire burning in their hearts.

With no time to waste, they returned to Jerusalem to find the disciples and shared their experience. The story is confirmed. Jesus was recognised when He broke bread.

Henry discovered God when he looked for Him.

The lady found God when He drew alongside her.

The women at the tomb found God in their grief and despair.

The Eleven discovered God in their fear and distress.

Cleopas and his companion found God when they shared in everyday hospitality.

Jesus becomes an experience - when the time is right. That takes me back to the last line of the poem ‘Easter Evening’ [above]. It reminds me that Jesus meets **US** when **WE** are ready to receive Him - and that is significant for me. Not as a matter of fact, but when our minds, hearts and spirits are ready to experience Him. It could be through a total stranger, the most unexpected experience, through a conversation, when we kneel at His table and break bread, or in everyday hospitality.

QUESTION: When did you first experience Jesus?

[If this is used in an own arrangement Service, it might be appropriate here to invite one or two people to share their testimony.]

Prayers of Love and Concern:

INVITATION:

As we come to our prayers for others and ourselves, spend a little time, if you are able, thinking about the questions below. If you are confined to your home, think of the people who came to meet you.

Lord Jesus, we come in stillness to seek You. We pause now to recall in our minds the week that has passed. As we do, we ask You to show us where You were present. Perhaps we didn't notice You at the time, but can see You now as we remember.

- *What significant events happened to me this week? Did I recognise Jesus in those moments?*
- *Where did I go? Did I recognise Jesus in those places?*
- *Who did I meet? Did I recognise Jesus in those encounters?*

Did we invite Jesus to be with us? Did we feel assured of His presence?

Lord, we rejoice that You were with us, even if we couldn't recognise You. You were there in moments of pain and sorrow as well as deep joy and fun. We thank You that You are always present, whatever our circumstances, whether we can recognise Your presence or not. As we go into a new week, help us to look more closely for Your presence.

Lord Jesus, You are with each of us in all the tiny details of our lives. You are also there in the important moments:

Lord, you are there in our locality and You are there in the big events in the world. We bring to You now the places and people who have made the news headlines this week.....

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
and open our eyes to see Your presence.

We lift to You all young people back at school and all those who are preparing for exams. We pray for pupils, students and teachers in this very busy term.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
And open our eyes to see Your presence.

We pray for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit. We ask for Your comforting presence to help them in their pain. We pray for patience and courage for all those who look after them. We pray for the lonely, isolated and the housebound. For all who are carers, paid or unpaid; known or unknown. And we pray for those who are sorrowful today. Help them to know that Your resurrection means that there is hope for the future.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
and open our eyes to see Your presence.

Lord, we think of the week ahead. You are already going before us, and we thank You that You are preparing our way. Show us how to be Christ-bringers wherever we go so that others will recognise Your reality through us. We commit the new week to You, asking that You will help us see You at every turn. Forgive us when we ignore the signs and guide us forward into all the new wonders that will greet us in the resurrection hope You have given us.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
and open our eyes to see Your presence.

Lead us ever onwards into Your light. **Amen.**

Hymn: I Know That My Redeemer Lives (StF 303)

I know that my Redeemer lives –
what joy the blessed assurance gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead’;
He lives, my everlasting Head!
He lives, my everlasting Head!

He lives, to bless me with His love;
He lives, to plead for me above;
He lives, my hungry soul to feed,
He lives, to help in time of need.
He lives, to help in time of need.

He lives, and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives, my mansion to prepare;
He lives, to lead me safely there.
He lives, to lead me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His name;
He lives, my Saviour, still the same;
what joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!
I know that my Redeemer lives!

Samuel Medley (1738 – 1799)

Sunday 26th April 2026 – The Fourth Sunday of Easter

This service has been compiled by Rev'd James Pritchard

Call to Worship:

Come as you are. Come those who long for a voice they can trust.

Come those who need space to breathe. Christ calls us by name; Christ makes room for all.

Let us worship the one who leads us into life.

Hymn: The King Of Love My Shepherd Is, (StF 479)

The King of love my shepherd is,

whose goodness faileth never;

I nothing lack if I am his

and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:

Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

Henry Williams Baker (1821–1877)

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous God, we thank you for your steady care.

For guidance that does not shame us, for presence that does not leave us alone. For your love beyond all we can imagine we give thanks and praise.

For your love that led Christ to the cross where he died and rose again for even death could not contain love's power we give thanks and praise.

We give thanks for those around who show your love and demonstrate your care.

We give you thanks for the small blessings of life and for glimmers of hope in the darkness.

We give thanks for friends who speak truth with gentleness, for leaders who serve with integrity, for organisers and carers who keep life going in hard places.

Most of all we give thanks for Christ who offers us life and gives it generously. **Amen**

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Hymn: The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want; (StF 481)

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me lie in pastures green,
he leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil;
and my cup — it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path —
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

Stuart Townend (b. 1963) Words and Music: © 1996, Thankyou Music.

John 10 1-10

10 “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Reflection

Some of my favourite words of Jesus words I always try and remember come in the Gospel passage we heard where Jesus says ‘I have come that you might have life – life abundantly’ – In that simple phrase are words to nourish, to feed and to warm our hearts - words that are not hypothetical but about experience – about ‘what is possible when we trust in God. ‘Life abundantly’!

Words about faith can seem empty – what is needed is for them to be transformed into an experience – an inner knowledge... a deep memory....

Much of life might not actually be that memorable but the heights and the depths can sometimes bring meaning to the everyday. When Jesus says you might have life abundantly, I don’t think it means we always live on a high but that there is an abundance - a joy that can be tapped into even in the mundane of the everyday – the unmemorable or even the very memorable painful times and occasions of life for there is an abundance in God.

In the reading from John’s gospel are a variety of images about shepherding, sheepfolds and gates. It’s perhaps helpful to remember that a typical was a bit different. A sheepfold in Jesus’ day was a pen with a rock-built wall that often surrounded the mouth of a cave to provide shelter from inclement weather. Thorny plants grew over the wall to deter wolves and other predators. A gate in the wall provided access to the fold, which could be used by more than one shepherd and his flock. A group of shepherds might hire a gatekeeper to guard the sheep overnight. Sometimes a shepherd lay across the gate to act as a door to the fold. Sheep recognised their shepherd by the sound of his voice or his tuneful whistle. Some shepherds knew their sheep so well that they named them

and called them out of the fold to follow them to pasture. So, the reading paints an evocative picture of a shepherd's care for his flock, in the face of the risks and dangers from predators, thieves and bad weather. Shepherding is an image of pastoral care in which 'knowing' means healing, sustaining, and keeping safe, and 'being known' means feeling confident and secure enough to follow Jesus into the wider world, trusting that he is able to bring out the best in life.

Some words which are perhaps some of the most memorable in all scripture are those of Psalm 23, certainly familiar words to many. But the words themselves have a power beyond their physical place upon a page. I guess for many they will connect with events or occasions and more than likely a funeral, or several funerals of friends, neighbours, family members. The words have become intimately connected to our experience of life and death. They hopefully also express something of our experience of faith, of our lives as those in which God is present, in the joys and the sorrow, and in God who blesses us and watches over us.

In the familiar words of the psalm, we have a reminder of our connection with what has been, with relationships with those who now rest in God's mercy. In the words we have encouragement too for all the times, seasons, occasions of life – words of comfort, words proclaiming God's loving care and of the strength God offers and of the hope we can have even in the darkest times.

Theologian Walter Brueggemann commentating on this psalm said: *'wilderness becomes home, isolation becomes companionship, scarcity becomes generosity. That is how the life of faith is.'*

The words from the psalm can remain words - or like all words from scripture they can be transformed by our experience of faith – our trusting them to be true and letting them feed and nourish us.

So let us be encouraged that God never leaves us, let us treasure our memories of times gone by, the past occasion when we knew God particularly close. Let us give thanks for our feeding and nourishment over

the years and trust in God the giver of life abundantly, for today and all the days to come. **Amen**

A Prayer of Confession and Renewal:

Lord, where the waters of our life have been troubled, you still our hearts and minds.

In your mercy, **restore our souls.**

Where we have walked in strange and difficult ways, you guide us in the right paths.

In your mercy, **restore our souls.**

Where we have walked even through the valley of death, you have been beside us.

In your mercy, **restore our souls.**

May our sins be forgiven and our souls restored through Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Hymn: For The Healing Of The Nations, (StF 696)

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (1929–2009) Words: © 1968, Stainer & Bell Ltd,

Prayers of Intercession:

Holy One, we bring you the world as it is, and we ask for your wide mercy.
We pray for those who feel hemmed in by fear, for anyone living under
threat at home or in public, open safer paths, and raise up protection that
is real.

For communities under strain, where food, housing, care or work feel
precarious, let fairness grow.

For those harmed by controlling leadership in churches, workplaces,
families, and institutions. Bring truth-telling, accountability and healing.

For all who carry pain in body or mind, for those who feel unseen or
dismissed, let care be respectful, accessible and timely.

For your Church, teach us to share life, to notice who is missing and to
practise true welcome.

*Hold before God those people places and situations on your heart at this
time...*

Receive these prayers and shape us into people who help life flourish, in
the name of Jesus, **Amen.**

You may wish to say the Lord's prayer here

Hymn: Through The Love Of God Our Saviour (StF 639) (Tune 'All through the Night')

Through the love of God our Saviour
all will be well.

Free and changeless is his favour;
all, all is well.

Precious is the blood that healed us,
perfect is the grace that sealed us,
strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;
all must be well.

Though we pass through tribulation,
all will be well.

Christ has purchased full salvation,
all, all is well.

Happy still in God confiding,
fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
all must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;
all will be well.

Faith can sing through days of sorrow
all, all is well.

On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
then in living or in dying,
all must be well.

Mary Peters (1813–1856)

A Final Prayer:

May God's loving care enfold us; as we live in the light of Christ's love,
may the Holy Spirit sustain us with life abundantly here and into eternity.

Amen.

Some material from Roots for churches and Priming the Lectionary (G Hopkins 2026)

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