

# **North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)**

## **Service Sheets For the Month of March 2024**

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## Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2024 – Lent 3

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom*

### **Call to Worship:**

Come, you who are weary with waiting.  
Come, you who are hungry for change and fulfilment.  
Come, you who are lost and seeking direction.  
Come, to the one who will refresh, revive and redeem

### **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 now.

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.

### **Prayer of Adoration:**

God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,  
you nurture and nourish the soil of our lives,  
you watch over us patiently and expectantly,  
you fill us with the nutrients we need in order to grow,  
and you rejoice when we too,  
nurture, protect and watch over others – in your name.

**Amen.**

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Lord God,  
forgive us when we are slow to change, but quick to judge;  
when we take more from life than we give back;  
when we give up on others too soon and offer support too late;  
when we deny others the opportunity to grow, and uproot their dreams.  
Forgive us and grant us your patience, perseverance and vision,  
and inspire us to care for all you have made.  
We ask this in Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

### **Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Loving God, in whom all things are possible,  
for giving us time enough to change and grow:  
**we thank you with all our heart.**

For giving us the desire to change and grow:  
**we thank you with all our mind.**

For giving us the opportunity to change and grow:  
**we thank you with all our soul.**

And for forgiving us when we rush, judge  
and deny others those same opportunities:

**we thank you with all our strength.  
Amen.**

**Hymn: Jesus, You Are Changing Me**

Jesus, You are changing me  
By Your Spirit You're making me like You  
Jesus, You're transforming me  
That Your loveliness may be seen in all I do  
You are the potter and I am the clay  
Help me to be willing to let You have Your way  
Jesus, You are changing me  
As I let You reign supreme within my heart.

**Bible Reading: Luke 13:1-9**

<sup>13</sup> Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

<sup>8</sup> "Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

**Thought For The Week:**

Those who know television series *Dad's Army* will no doubt recall the undertaker Private Frazer's catchphrase: 'We're all doomed!' It is what he said whenever any disaster threatened the platoon. It seemed to chime in so well with his character – and occupation. Well, there were people like that in Jesus' day, who were inclined to see God's judgement at work whenever tragedy struck, especially when it struck other people. What is worse was the unspoken notion that because it had *not* happened to them, they must be special people (better, not as sinful, and so on). But Jesus responded to this by saying that bad things can happen unexpectedly to anyone. So, rather than point the finger at the victims, everyone needs to change their ways while there is still time to do so. He reinforces this, or perhaps helps people to remember it, with a story about a barren fig tree. The owner wants to cut it down, seeing it as a waste of space. But the gardener pleads for more time, for a second chance.

Of course, the parable is about us not horticulture, but figs are grown for fruit rather than leaves. And God is looking for fruitful lives from us today, just as then. So, the story contains both a challenge and a chance.

You know what happens when a sports team is not performing very well: a new manager or coach is appointed. Would you expect the team to start winning immediately, and demand if they didn't that the new person is replaced? Would you not give the new person some time to make the necessary changes and opportunities to improve? On the other hand, you probably won't wait indefinitely. You would expect to see some results and might even set a 'cut-off' date. So, what about us and God?

The Bible could be described as a book of second chances, especially for God's chosen people. Peter is given several second chances. So is Paul – or rather, Saul, as he was at the time. These are two very obvious New Testament examples, but there are plenty more.

There are similar stories outside the Bible too. John Newton – the one who wrote 'Amazing grace' - captained slave ships as a young man and invested money in this horrific and evil trade. When his ship was caught in a violent storm, fearing for his life, he turned to God. That was the moment God gave him a second chance, although it took time for him to see that slavery was incompatible with his faith. But then he joined Wilberforce in his campaign against slavery, preached against the slave trade, and lived to see it abolished – and of course wrote the song we know so well. He truly was a wretch but God changed him.

If God allows time for change, so must we, both as individuals and as a community. Faith is not like instant coffee. It is more like a plant that needs to be nurtured, trained and given space to grow. There may – there will – be disappointments, but there will be glorious surprises as well.

**Hymn: Amazing Grace! (StF 440)**

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,  
His Word my hope secures;  
He will my Shield and Portion be,  
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess, within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who called me here below,  
Will be forever mine.

When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.

**Prayers of Intercession:**

God of Grace,  
we pray for those who live in areas of conflict and violence  
where bullets and bombs bring destruction and devastation  
– may your love be known.

**May your presence bring hope.**

We pray for those who suffer the pain of famine and drought  
and the after-effects of natural disaster  
– may your love be known.

**May your presence bring hope.**

We pray for those who suffer the pain of illness and disease,  
their own or that of a loved one  
– may your love be known.

**May your presence bring hope.**

We pray for those who suffer the grief and torment of bereavement  
– may your love be known.

**May your presence bring hope.**

God of love, we humbly offer to you all the suffering of our world,  
and we pray that you will bring healing and peace;  
for the sake of your dear Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

**Hymn: I Will Sing The Wondrous Story (StF 323)**

I will sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ Who died for me;  
How He left His home in glory  
For the cross of Calvary.

*Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ Who died for me,  
Sing it with the saints in glory,  
Gathered by the crystal sea.*

I was lost, but Jesus found me,  
Found the sheep that went astray,  
Threw His loving arms around me,  
Drew me back into His way.

I was bruised, but Jesus healed me,  
Faint was I from many a fall,  
Sight was gone, and fears possessed me,  
But He freed me from them all.

Days of darkness still come o'er me,  
Sorrow's path I often tread,  
But His presence still is with me;  
By His guiding hand I'm led.

Soon He'll come the Lord of glory,  
Come the church His bride to claim,  
And complete the wondrous story—  
Come, Lord Jesus, come again!

He will keep me till the river  
Rolls its waters at my feet;  
Then He'll bear me safely over,  
Where the loved ones I shall meet.

**Blessing:**

Lord God, you look for growth and fruit;  
help us this week to grow closer to you,  
and to be patient when we have to wait –  
as you are patient with us.

**Amen.**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – Lent 4 (Mothering Sunday)**

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton.*

**Opening Words:**

Let us worship God, who is mother and father,  
alpha and omega, beginning and the end,  
life and being beyond all we can imagine.  
Let us worship God.

**Hymn: For The Beauty Of The Earth (StF 102)**

For the beauty of the earth,  
for the beauty of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies:

*Gracious God to thee we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour  
of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale, and tree and flower,  
sun and moon and stars of light:

*Gracious God to thee we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of ear and eye,  
for the heart and mind's delight,  
for the mystic harmony  
linking sense to sound and sight:

*Gracious God to thee we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of human love,  
brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth, and friends above,  
pleasures pure and undefiled:

*Gracious God to thee we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For each perfect gift and sign  
of your love so freely given,  
graces human and divine,  
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

*Gracious God to thee we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

**Prayer:**

Loving God, we thank you and praise you because your love for us never ends. You revealed your love when Jesus came into the world, showing us how to live and how to be fully human. And even though we didn't understand and turned against him, still you love us. You made this world to be our home; you are with us wherever we go; you made us able to think and to speak and to love. Loving God, we thank you and praise you because your love for us never ends. **Amen.**

Since 2020 Mothering Sunday feels more poignant to me for it was that day that marked the beginning of our journey with Covid. The twelve months that followed saw so many of us separated from our families –young children unable to feel the comforting cuddle of a grandmother and adult children not able to hug their parents. At various times during that year mums and dads turned teacher and collectively, to the best of their abilities, did an amazing job at home schooling their children. For some the stress and anxiety of those long months put additional strain on relationships, and hopes and dreams were shattered. And yet in the midst of the turmoil and

uncertainty we all faced the natural cycle of life went on. Babies were born and new life celebrated, albeit not in the way we might have wanted. Loved ones died and their deaths were mourned, but not necessarily in the way we needed to. And all the emotions we experienced in that year, in fact all the emotions we experience in every year of our lives, are encompassed in the people we meet in the Bible, and especially in the women. People like the Pharaoh's daughter, Sarah and Shiphrah, Hannah and Naomi, Anna, Lois and Eunice, and Mary. Their stories, and we're going to hear two of them in a moment, show us how there is a place for 'mothering' in all relationships. And Mothering Sunday gives us an opportunity to reflect not just about mothers but about the wider experience of family life – both within our human families and the family of God.

Our readings today don't skirt around the harsh emotions that come with living in the real world. The Bible makes no attempt to sugar-coat or sentimentalise what mothering, what parenting, means.

**Reading: Exodus 2: 1–10 NLT**

<sup>1</sup> At this time, man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. <sup>2</sup>The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was a special baby and kept him hidden for three months. <sup>3</sup>But when she could no longer hide him, she got a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. <sup>4</sup>The baby's sister then stood at a distance, watching to see what would happen to him.

<sup>5</sup>Soon Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, and her attendants walked along the riverbank. When the princess saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it for her. <sup>6</sup>When the princess opened it, she saw the baby. The little boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This must be one of the Hebrew children," she said.

<sup>7</sup>Then the baby's sister approached the princess. "Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" she asked.

<sup>8</sup>"Yes, do!" the princess replied. So the girl went and called the baby's mother.

<sup>9</sup>"Take this baby and nurse him for me," the princess told the baby's mother. "I will pay you for your help." So the woman took her baby home and nursed him.

<sup>10</sup>Later, when the boy was older, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her own son. The princess named him Moses, for she explained, "I lifted him out of the water."

This story of the early life of Moses shows the love that mothers have for their children; a love that has to let children go but a love that remains constant, never abandoning nor breaking the relationship. Our next hymn recognises that too. Written by Fred Kaan when he was serving as a part-time minister for a small housing estate in Swindon, the hymn gives thanks for the possibility of parenthood and the inspiration found in the loving heart of God, but it also recognises that all relationships are equal in God's eyes and have value and significance, whether we are parents or not.

**Hymn: God of Eve and God of Mary (StF 119) tune Sussex (Father hear the prayer we offer)**

God of Eve and God of Mary,  
God of love and mother-earth,  
thank you for the ones who with us  
shared their life and gave us birth.

As you came to earth in Jesus,  
so you come to us today;  
you are present in the caring  
that prepares us for life's way.

Thank you that the Church, our Mother,  
gives us bread and fills our cup,  
and the comfort of the Spirit  
warms our hearts and lifts us up.

Thank you for belonging, shelter,  
bonds of friendship, ties of blood,  
and for those who have no children,  
yet are parents under God.

God of Eve and God of Mary,  
Christ our brother, human Son,  
Spirit, caring like a Mother,  
Take our love and make us one!

**Reading: John 19:25–27 NLT**

<sup>25</sup>Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son." <sup>27</sup>And he said to this disciple, "Here is your mother." And from then on this disciple took her into his home.

**Reflection:**

Apart from recording who was with Jesus when he died, we might wonder why John thought it important to include these words. Was it because any words that Jesus said at this time were bound to be remembered? Was it simply a record of what took place? Or is there some deeper significance here? While we may never know what the exact answer is to these questions, we can be sure that the relationship between Jesus and his mother was strong to the end, even if at times Mary might have not completely understood all that was happening. While the pain of Jesus must have been immense at this moment, Mary must also have been in agony as she watched her son being taken away from her in such an appalling manner. We see here another real and recognisable side of motherhood. The one of shared suffering between a parent and their child because however old they and their children might be, parents still suffer their children's hurts with them. Pain that hurts us hurts our parents too.

We are also reminded in this story of that tender reversal of roles that happens to many of us as we grow older, when we find that instead of caring for our children, they have started to take care of us. Jesus shows this loving care as he gives Mary and the disciple one another to love and look after. And it is this action that adds a significance to Mothering Sunday that goes beyond the mother/child relationship. When Jesus, from the cross, commits his grieving mother into the care of the disciple he loves, we are seeing a wonderful example of one of God's greatest gifts to us all, the gift of one another; given to care for, and to look after, each other. It is a gift that comes from God's parenting of us – God knows what it means to live in a family, he knows what it means to live a single life, he knows what it means to live in community. He knows that all relationships come with both joys and sorrows, with heartaches and pain. He knows that loving others makes us vulnerable. And as we walk together through the years - as we learn when to encourage and when to admonish; as we discover when to protect and when to let go - part of our vulnerability comes from having the humility to accept the love and care that is being offered to us as well as offering that love and care to others. Of knowing when to allow ourselves to be 'mothered' or 'parented'. For there is a place for mothering in all relationships, including our relationship with God.

**Hymn: Everyone Needs Compassion (StF 627)**

Everyone needs compassion,  
love that's never failing;  
let mercy fall on me.  
Everyone needs forgiveness,  
the kindness of a Saviour;  
the Hope of nations.

*Saviour,  
He can move the mountains,  
my God is mighty to save,  
he is mighty to save.  
Forever,  
Author of salvation,  
he rose and conquered the grave,  
Jesus conquered the grave.*

So take me as you find me,  
all my fears and failures;  
fill my life again.  
I give my life to follow  
everything I believe in;



now I surrender.

*Saviour,  
He can move the mountains,  
my God is mighty to save,  
he is mighty to save.  
Forever,  
Author of salvation,  
he rose and conquered the grave,  
Jesus conquered the grave.*

Shine your light  
and let the whole world see,  
we're singing for the glory  
of the risen King, Jesus.  
Shine your light  
and let the whole world see  
we're singing for the glory  
of the risen King.

*Saviour,  
He can move the mountains,  
my God is mighty to save,  
he is mighty to save.  
Forever,  
Author of salvation,  
he rose and conquered the grave,  
Jesus conquered the grave.*

### **A Story:**

A mother sent her daughter to the corner shop to buy some milk. It was to be the little girl's first such trip on her own. The mother made it plain her little girl should go straight to the shop and then come straight home. However, the girl was away for two hours. Her mother was almost beside herself with worry. When her daughter arrived home she tore strips off her, 'Where have you been?'

The girl was quick to answer, 'I'm so sorry Mum. I know I'm late. But Jane broke her doll and I had to stop and help her fix it.'

Her mother replied, 'And how could you help her fix a broken doll?'

The girl's response – 'I couldn't, but I sat down with her and helped her cry.'

There is a place for mothering in all relationships, including our friendships and our relationship with God.

### **Prayer:**

**'As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you' Isaiah 66: 13**

Lord God, we pray for mothers everywhere.

Like Moses' mother, may they have wisdom to know how to protect their children and keep them from harm.

Like Naomi, may they be able to turn difficult situations into good.

Like Lois and Eunice, may they be ready to share the love of Christ with their children.

And in all that they give to others may they have the joy of knowing that they too are children, held in the love and care of God.

'As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you', says the Lord. **May it be so for us.**

We pray for anyone who needs the care of a mother:

for those for whom this is a hard day,

for those who are suffering as a result of broken relationships,

for anyone who is feeling lost, lonely, fragile, or afraid.

'As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you', says the Lord. **May it be so for us.**

Lord God, we thank you for those who care for us:

for their nurture and care;

for their example and inspiration;  
for their love and friendship.

‘As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you’, says the Lord. **May it be so for us.**

We ask you to bless all who live alone,  
those who have lost their partner in marriage,  
those who have never married,  
those whose families are grown up and away from home  
and those who have outlived other members of their families and many of their friends.  
And we remember before you those whose mothers have died.  
Those for whom the grief is still recent and raw, and whose tears come often.  
And those for whom the years have dulled the pain, but for whom the sense of loss will always be there.  
‘As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you’, says the Lord. **May it be so for us.**

And we pray for ourselves, giving thanks for the gift of one another.  
May we have the understanding and compassion to love and care for each other  
and may we have the humility to accept the love and care that is offered to us.  
And may the way we live with one another proclaim the truth of your constant love for us.  
In Jesus’ name we pray. **Amen**

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

#### **Hymn: Love Divine (StF 503 / H&P 267)**

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,

Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation,  
perfectly restored in thee  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

#### **Blessing:**

May God the Father keep us in his care.  
May the Lord Jesus Christ be our constant friend  
and the Holy Spirit guide us in all that we do,  
now and always.

**Amen.**

## Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – Passion Sunday

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Christine Legge*

### **Call to Worship:**

Come, let us worship the God who loves every single different one of us, whoever and wherever we are, and invites us all into a covenant relationship based on love.

### **Prayer:**

You, Lord God, are with us as we come to worship you.

You have promised us so much

and your call to us has brought us to this point.

Accept our worship, our words and thoughts,

our confessions and our promises;

for you are ours and we are yours, this and every day.

**Amen.**

### **Hymn: Praise To The Living God! (StF 87)**

Praise to the living God!

All praised be his Name,

who was, and is, and is to be,

for e'er the same;

The one eternal God,

ere ought that now appears,

the First, the Last, beyond all thought

his timeless years!

Formless, all lovely forms

Declare his loveliness;

Holy, no holiness of earth

Can his express.

Lo, he is Lord of all!

Creation speaks his praise

And everywhere, above, below,

His will obeys.

His Spirit flowing free,

high surging where it will—

in prophet's word he spoke of old—

is speaking still.

Established is God's law,

and changeless it shall stand,

deep writ upon the human heart,

on sea, or land.

Eternal life has he

Implanted in the soul;

His love shall be our strength and stay,

While ages roll.

Praise to the living God!

All praised be his name,

Who was, and is, and is to be,

For e'er the same

Medieval Jewish Doxology  
Translate by Max Landsberg (1845 – 1928)  
And Newton Mann (1836 – 1926)

## **A Prayer of Confession and an Assurance of Forgiveness**

### **A Prayer of Confession**

Eternal, Holy God, our God who reigns supreme,  
forgive us that, although your promises are steadfast and sure,  
we have so often broken our covenant promises to you;  
we have strayed and failed you and our neighbours;  
we have thought and said things we ought not to have done;  
we have sat by when we should have been active and involved.  
Forgive us, and let us renew our covenant promise to you,  
to live as your people to the best of our abilities.

**Amen.**

### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

You Lord have spoken; your voice has been made known.  
You no longer remember our wrongs or hold them against us.  
You know us inside out, you have heard our confession,  
and our sins you have forgiven. **Amen.**

*As we prepare to read and reflect on Scripture we sing together:*

### **Hymn: Help Us, O Lord to Learn (StF 501)**

Help us, O Lord, to learn  
the truths thy word imparts:  
to study that thy laws may be  
inscribed upon our hearts.

Help us, O Lord, to live  
the faith which we proclaim,  
that all our thoughts and words and deeds  
may glorify thy name.

Help us, O Lord, to teach  
the beauty of thy ways,  
that yearning souls may find the Christ,  
and sing aloud his praise.

*Our passage of scripture today comes from the Old Testament prophecy of Jeremiah*

### **Reading: Jeremiah 31: 31–34**

<sup>31</sup> “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
“when I will make a new covenant  
with the people of Israel  
and with the people of Judah.

<sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant  
I made with their ancestors  
when I took them by the hand  
to lead them out of Egypt,  
because they broke my covenant,  
though I was a husband to them,”  
declares the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel  
after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds  
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.

<sup>34</sup> No longer will they teach their neighbour,  
or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’  
because they will all know me,

from the least of them to the greatest,”  
declares the LORD.  
“For I will forgive their wickedness  
and will remember their sins no more.”

*Before we turn to our thoughts and reflections we sing together a beautiful hymn which reminds us of God's unfailing steadfastness to us and love for us offering each of us hope and promise*

**Hymn: From The Breaking Of The Dawn (StF 156)**

From the breaking of the dawn  
To the setting of the sun,  
I will stand on every promise of Your word.  
Words of power, strong to save,  
That will never pass away,  
I will stand on every promise of Your word.  
For Your covenant is sure,  
And on this I am secure,  
I can stand on every promise of Your word.

When I stumble and I sin,  
Condemnation pressing in,  
I will stand on every promise of Your word.  
You are faithful to forgive,  
That in freedom I might live,  
So I stand on every promise of Your word.  
Guilt to innocence restored:  
You remember sins no more!  
So I'll stand on every promise of Your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice,  
I will listen for Your voice,  
And I'll stand on every promise of Your word.  
Through this dark and troubled land  
You will guide me with your hand  
As I stand on every promise of Your word.  
And you've promised to complete  
Every work begun in me,  
So I'll stand on every promise of Your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair,  
Love that casts out every fear,  
As I stand on every promise of Your word.  
Not forsaken, not alone,  
For the Comforter has come,  
And I stand on every promise of Your word.  
Grace sufficient, grace for me,  
Grace for all who will believe,  
We will stand on every promise of Your word.

Keith Getty (b. 1974) & Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

**Introduction:**

Following their time in the wilderness, the people of God settle into the 'promised land'. Their success at living as God's people is mixed, with periods of faithfulness to God and periods when they go astray. Through the prophets God calls them to return to living their covenant relationship with God. Close to 500 years after being set free from slavery, the land splits into two kingdoms, a divided people. A couple of hundred years later, having persistently ignored the warnings to turn back to God, the northern kingdom is captured by Assyria, the ruling superpower of the time, and is no more. Little over 100 years on, the much smaller southern kingdom is also ignoring warnings to turn back to God from, among others, Jeremiah. Jeremiah pronounces God's judgement on the remaining people of God, which will lead to their capture and

exile at the hands of Babylon, the current ruling superpower. However, Jeremiah's message is tinged with hope and promise. After the judgement and exile will come restoration. When God's people, in exile, turn back to God, God will make a new covenant with them. This covenant, described in today's reading, will be characterised by a close relationship with God. It will not rely on a knowledge of God mediated to the people by a few, or passed on through the stories of God's past interactions with them. It will be a new covenant, a covenant for this people, the current and future people of God. At its heart is the promise that 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (v.33). Some 500 years later, despite a return to God and from exile, the promise has not been fully realised and some of the people of God look for this being fulfilled in Jesus.

### Reflection:

Have you heard of a Paraclete? I remember, in my youth, attending a Sunday evening youth group where we sometimes played 'Call my Bluff'. This word was one of those which was described with three alternative explanations. The true explanation was that a Paraclete is a small leather box, bound to either the forehead or the wrist with a leather strap and in the box are words of scripture, easily accessible should the wearer need to refer to it at any time. I wonder how close we are to Scripture? Carrying a copy of the Psalms and New Testament, having God's word close at hand, is an ever present reminder of His care for us and his presence with us and if we happen to be waiting in a queue or for an appointment we can simply reach for it, open it, and have God speaking to us – how wonderful is that! Or perhaps we remember memory verses from years ago which we learnt at Sunday School: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16), or one of my favourites buried deep in the Old Testament in a short book by Zephaniah (3:17) 'The Lord your God is with you, He's mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.' Another of Jeremiah's well known prophecies appears a little earlier than our passage this morning, from Jeremiah 29:11 'For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' Knowing that God is for us, that he forgets our mistakes and constantly gives us a fresh start is seen clearly in Jesus' sacrifice for us, You and Me, on the Cross – how amazing is Our God!

In our passage Jeremiah reminds us that God makes a Covenant relationship with us – You and I - and it is engraved on our hearts, so that we can know God's love and protection of us. Just as the rainbow reminds us of God's Covenant with Noah and all of creation that he established between himself and all the earth (Genesis 9:17) so he promises again to forgive us and forget our sins. Let's read it again:

<sup>33</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD.

"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

<sup>34</sup> No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'

because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD.

"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Luis Palau tells the story of an encounter between Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, and her friend. The friend reminds Clara of a painful experience Clara had had some years previously, in which she had been treated badly. Clara shows no sign of remembering this event. Her friend persists: surely, she must remember this! 'No,' says Clara, 'I distinctly remember forgetting it'. The new covenant (John 12:20–33) is characterised by a relationship based on remembering and forgetting: all people (with no limits) remembering that they belong to God; and God forgetting all the times that they – and we – have been out of step with God.

- I invite you to write, on a slip of paper (or at the back of this booklet), the name of someone about whom you are concerned and who you want to pray for. Think beyond your immediate family and friends, or folk you know from church, perhaps from a Newspaper headline or someone you've heard is in need. Try to think of someone who is quite different from yourself – e.g. much older or younger, or who lives far away.

- Then pray:  
God,  
may those whom we hold in our hands right now  
know the power and comfort and encouragement  
and strength of your love and blessing.  
We ask in Jesus' name.  
**Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession:**

As we remember all those who are adversely treated  
because of their place of origin or their skin tone,  
we pray for the time to come when all people  
will rejoice in the diversity of different colours and races,  
different cultures and backgrounds.

Your kingdom come  
**on earth as in heaven.**

As we remember those who are vulnerable,  
frightened to leave their homes for fear of street crimes,  
we pray for the time to come when violence will be no more  
and all will live in security and safety.

Your kingdom come  
**on earth as in heaven.**

As we remember those who have suffered abuse at the hands of friend or stranger, and who bear the scars  
physical, mental and emotional,  
we pray for the time when all women and all men will respect each other, and where children will not fear  
violence or abuse.

Your kingdom come  
**on earth as in heaven.**

As we remember those whose human rights are ignored,  
those used as political pawns in disputes between nations,  
those who live in constant fear of the bomb or the bullet,  
and as we especially remember for the people of Gaza, Israel and Ukraine and those other places in your world  
which have fallen out of the spotlight of world news, we pray for the time when peace will reign throughout the  
world.

Your kingdom come  
**on earth as in heaven.**

As we remember those who are alone and isolated,  
those who mourn,  
those who are ill and those who look after loved ones,  
and as we especially remember...  
we pray for the time when there will be no more pain or tears  
and when all will live in full community.

Your kingdom come  
**on earth as in heaven.**

Loving Lord, as we look upon each other  
may we see your image which we all share;  
may we love as we are loved,  
and may we welcome as we have been welcomed by you.

In your name we pray.  
**Amen.**

### **Hymn: How Great Thou Art (StF 82)**

O Lord My God! When I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,

Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,  
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;

And when I think that God His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die – I scarce can take it in.  
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation  
And take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!  
Then shall I bow in humble adoration  
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!

Stuart K. Hine (1899-1989)

Vv 1,2,3 based on O store Gud 1885 by  
Carol Gustaf Boberg (1859- 1940)

#### **A Sending Out Prayer:**

Thank you, God, for each and every one of your amazing people,  
every one of them unique.

We go on with our day joyfully, knowing that your love is always there for us and reaches to every place and  
part of the whole world,  
and all the millions and billions of people, in every generation.

May that inspire and encourage us  
to be loving to all whom we meet in our day-to-day living.

**Amen.**

#### **Blessing**

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you now and with all those whom you love and cherish,  
in this world and the next, for evermore. **Amen.**



## Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – Palm Sunday

*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:**

God of all, open our minds to Your greatness,  
Your awesome power and love.  
Open our hearts to Your grace and mercy,  
Your free and full forgiveness.  
Open our souls to Your healing touch,  
Your transforming and redeeming purpose.  
Open our lives to everything You have done, are doing, and will continue to do  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
In Him, with Him, and through Him,  
May we live and move and have our being. **Amen.**

### **Hymn: All Glory, Laud And Honour (StF 262)**

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 Blesséd One.

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.

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.

All glory, laud and honour  
To Thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
Made sweet hosannas ring!

St Theodulph of Orleans (d. 821)  
translated by John Mason Neale (1811-1866)

### **Prayers of Praise and Confession:**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
As we remember Your triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we are reminded of how easy it would have been for  
You to take the easy option, to follow the way of the world.  
With the shouts of welcome still ringing in Your ears,

The hosannas of the crowd still fresh in Your memory,  
It must have been so tempting to give them what they wanted,  
To be the sort of Messiah they hoped You would be.  
But with You, there was no compromise,  
No watering down of Your message for the sake of popular acclaim.  
You stayed true to Your calling despite the inevitable consequences.  
Lord,  
We find it so hard to stay true in turn,  
So difficult not to bend a little here and there.

Thank You that we deserve it so little that You love us so much;  
You value each of us infinitely, enough to die for.  
Thank You for staying true to Your chosen path; despite the hostility You faced,  
The misunderstanding You endured,  
The pain You suffered and the darkness You confronted.  
In the ugliness that scars the beauty of this world,  
The shadow of evil, hatred and death,  
Teach us that Your love shines through and Your love will triumph,  
Life, now and for all eternity, being held safe in Your hands. **Amen.**

**You may like to join in The Lord's Prayer here ... Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen.**

#### **Old Testament Reading: Zechariah 9:1-10 THE COMING OF ZION'S KING NIV**

‘ Rejoice, greatly, O Daughter of Zion!  
Shout Daughter of Jerusalem!  
see, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation,  
Gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem,  
And the battle bow will be broken.  
He will proclaim peace to the nations.  
His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.’

#### **Introduction:**

Jesus sends two of His disciples to fetch a donkey on which He will ride into Jerusalem. As Jesus rides towards Jerusalem, bystanders greet Him with shouts of acclamation. Some spread their cloaks, and others leafy branches, on the road as He passes by. When He reaches Jerusalem, Jesus goes immediately to the Temple. After looking around, He and His twelve disciples withdraw to Bethany for the night.

#### **Gospel Reading: Mark 11:1-11 THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY NIV**

‘As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethpage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no-one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, “Why are you doing this? Tell him, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.””  
They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing untying that colt? “ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, He sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

*“Hosanna!”*

*“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”*

*“Hosanna in the highest!”*

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.”

### **Hymn: Make Way, Make Way (StF 264)**

Make way, make way, for Christ the King  
In splendour arrives;  
Fling wide the gates and welcome Him  
Into your lives.

*Refrain: Make way [Make way], make way [make way].  
For the King of Kings [for the King of Kings]  
Make way [Make way], make way [make way]  
And let His Kingdom in.*

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

*Refrain:*

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,  
Who weep and sigh,  
With laughter, joy and royal crown  
He'll beautify.

*Refrain:*

We call you now to worship Him  
As Lord of all,  
To have no gods before Him,  
Their thrones shall fall!

*Refrain:*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

### **Reflection:**

It is just nine months since London became the focus of the world's stage as years of planning and preparation came to fruition as the procession of the new king and queen left Buckingham Palace for the Coronation at Westminster Abbey. Thousands of onlookers lined the route, hoping to get a glimpse of this marvellous spectacle – something not witnessed by the majority of people in generations. Just a glimpse would be enough – to be able to say they were there. Those who followed the occasion on television had the most comprehensive view as cameras covered the whole event which began with the pageantry and splendour of a vast parade of military on horseback, uniforms polished to perfection, bands and service personnel leading the procession. Then came the golden coach pulled by horses carrying the king and queen on their way to fulfil their destiny, greeted by the cheering, waving crowds lining the route. For most – of all ages – it was a once in a lifetime spectacle which will never be forgotten. In the Abbey, the new king was crowned amidst the pomp and ceremony afforded to the solemnity of the occasion, history reflected in the gold and jewels, gleaming and sparkling. A truly historic day.

There is no comparison with our Gospel reading this morning, also a story of a King, which had also been many years in the preparation – in the procession through cheering, waving crowds, as He entered into Jerusalem, where, ultimately, He would be crowned too. But there was no golden coach, pulled by stately horses, guards, bands, ceremonial, enthronement with a crown of the finest jewels – but a plaited crown of thorns. No majestic throne, but a roughly hewn cross of wood. It too was a once in a lifetime experience which will never be forgotten.

All four Gospels writers present a picture of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, each picking up a differing thread of the event that ripples under the main flow of the story. Mark begins by describing a setting rooted in the Old Testament. The prophet Zechariah describes the Coronation scene of God in chapter 14, and many scholars have made the connection between Zechariah and Mark chapter 11.

In v. 1, Mark specifically identifies the geographical location of Jesus and His disciples as “approaching Jerusalem”, the village of Bethpage. The journey to the Holy City and all the events that were to take place there are at last completed. Mark notes that their path leads them to the Mount of Olives, recalling that

Zechariah specifies that the Coronation procession for the king begins from there. In Jewish tradition, this is the place where the triumphal entry of the Messiah will begin. But for what were the Jews hoping? They expected a warrior king, riding into Jerusalem to take it by force, freeing them from Roman occupation.

Jesus first sends His disciples on ahead on a special mission. They are to go into the village where they will find a colt which no-one has ever ridden. No mention is made that Jesus pre-arranged it, but Jesus intuitively knows a colt meeting all His requirements is located on a certain street. He also passes on the words that “The Lord needs it” – a reference to Jesus as “the Lord” and not “the Lord – the master of the colt”. The disciples obey Jesus’ wishes and find the animal, exactly as Jesus said, and respond to the questions they were told to expect with the answers Jesus had given them.

Now the procession could begin. News travels fast! People began to line the road to Jerusalem in an air of expectation. Something revolutionary was about to happen. Cloaks were spread on the colt’s back as it had no saddle, and as the procession began, cloaks and palm branches were spread on the road by the crowds. Whether they realised it or not, this was symbolic of Jesus’ authority. Zechariah describes the same actions in v.9. There is one crucial difference. Zechariah is describing the warrior king whereas Mark is describing a ‘Prince of Peace’ King. The crowds cheer “Hosanna” which translates as a prayer for salvation: “Save now” or “Save I pray”. The crowd treats Jesus like royalty – but they do not know what is to come! The procession comes to an end and the crowds disperse as Jesus reaches the Temple where He takes a long look. Mark ends this triumphal entry scene - not with more great drama – but with an eerie silence. Jesus and His disciples not only leave without comment, they leave Jerusalem and return to Bethany. Like the king’s Coronation, those in the crowd welcoming and cheering Jesus only saw part of the event. Many who were there that day would return on Good Friday and chants of “Hosanna” would turn to “crucify”.

So, Holy Week has begun. We are now challenged to walk and watch with Jesus through all the events of this week; at His anger as He cleared the Temple Courts of commercialism; as He challenged the religious authorities; as He was anointed in preparation for his death; as He was betrayed and denied by His friends and as He bore the suffering of Crucifixion. When all seemed as if it had finished – it was only just beginning .....

#### **Prayer of Commitment:**

Lord Jesus Christ, teach us what it means to honour You,  
To enthrone You in our lives.  
Help us to understand that true commitment involves more than declaring our loyalty,  
However sincere that may be;  
More than homage offered with our lips, however eloquent that may sound.  
Teach us acclaim You from the heart with lives consecrated to Your service,  
Seeking Your will and walking Your way,  
So that we may truly acknowledge You as Lord  
And work meaningfully for the growth of Your Kingdom,  
On earth as it is in heaven.   **Amen.**

#### **Hymn: Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna In The Highest (StF 263)**

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!  
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!  
Lord, we lift up Your name, with hearts full of praise;  
Be exalted, O Lord, my God!  
Hosanna in the highest!

Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!  
Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!  
Lord, we lift up Your name, with hearts full of praise;  
Be exalted, O Lord my God!  
Glory to the King of kings!

Carl Tuttle (b. 1953)

**Prayers of Love and Concern:**

In the pauses between each prayer, you may like to remember situations and people who are close in your thoughts at this time ...

On this Palm Sunday, we pray for those who suffer prejudice, whether it be because of any kind of disability – physical, emotional, social or mental; race or colour; social poverty; inequality; social status: help us to recognise our prejudices and those of others, that You would inspire us to treat all people equally. We pray for all who work for a fairer and more just society, where all can be free to live, no matter what their circumstances.

We pray for all who walk in darkness, with no light and little hope: those living with addictions; those who cannot find employment; those struggling to house, feed and care for their families: may they know the promise and hope that only You can bring.

We pray for healing for those who mourn, who are suffering loss and sadness; those who are alone, rejected by family and friends; those who cannot find a place within society. Lord, teach us to be accepting and show us how to be instruments of Your healing.

Wonderful and mysterious God, hear our prayers, spoken and held in thought, through our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered for the wrongs of the world and overcame even death itself so that even we can live in eternal hope.

**Amen.**

**Hymn: Ride On, Ride On In Majesty (StF 265)**

Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
Hark, all the tribes Hosanna cry:  
Your humble beast pursues the 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 and 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:**

Send us out, Lord, rejoicing in Your love, renewed by Your grace, challenged by Your word and inspired by Your sacrifice.

Equip us to speak of You, go with us, and in all we do, help us to seek Your truth, show Your compassion. Celebrate Your blessings and strive for Your Kingdom. **Amen.**

## Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 – Easter Day

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom*

### Call to Worship

The Lord is risen.

#### **He is risen indeed:**

present as we revisit that early dawn,  
carrying fragrant spices to disguise the stench of death:  
looking for the living among the dead.

The Lord is risen.

#### **He is risen indeed:**

with us in all those panicked emotions,  
as we observe a stone rolled out of its fixture:  
looking for the living among the dead.

The Lord is risen.

#### **He is risen indeed:**

reaching out to us as we seek answers  
from two familiar strangers in dazzling white:  
looking for the living among the dead.

The Lord is risen.

#### **He is risen indeed:**

longing for us to understand that all this was meant to pass,  
as we hear again of hope amidst despair:  
looking for the living among the dead.

The Lord is risen.

#### **He is risen indeed:**

sharing the disbelief that our witness should be dismissed as idle talk,  
until others had seen for themselves:  
looking for the living among the dead.

The Lord is risen.

#### **He is risen indeed:**

rejoicing with us as we proclaim our alleluias,  
knowing that this story's ending is our beginning:  
no longer looking for the living among the dead.

The Lord is risen.

#### **He is risen indeed!**

**Alleluia! Amen!**

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

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!  
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!  
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!  
Sing, ye heavens, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!  
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!  
Death in vain forbids His rise, Alleluia!  
Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!  
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!  
Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!  
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!  
Foll'wing 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!  
Thee to know, Thy pow'r to prove, Alleluia!  
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!

**A Prayer of Approach and Adoration:**

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this Easter morning we adore you. We praise you for the good news of the resurrection,  
for the way it spread first to the disciples and now to us.  
Help us to hear it afresh today as though we were those first disciples.  
Help us to understand the difference it made to them and to their lives. And help us, today and always, to live as resurrection people  
and as people who tell good news to those around us.

**Amen.**

**A Prayer of Confession:**

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
for the times when we have failed to live as Easter people,  
in your mercy,

**Lord, forgive us.**

For the times when we have doubted the good news,  
in your mercy,

**Lord, forgive us.**

For the times when we have acted as though there was no good news,  
in your mercy,

**Lord, forgive us.**

For this morning, above all mornings, we claim for ourselves Jesus' promise, that in him our sins are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Amen**

**Hymn: All Heaven Declares The Glory Of The Risen Lord (StF 293)**

All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord  
Who can compare with the beauty of the Lord?  
Forever He will be  
The Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow the knee  
And worship Him alone

I will proclaim the glory of the risen Lord  
Who once was slain to reconcile man to God  
Forever You will be  
The Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow my knee  
And worship You alone

Forever You will be  
The Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow my knee  
And worship You alone

## **Story:**

Who got an easter egg? Here's a story about an easter egg hunt.

### **The Easter Day Egg Hunt**

#### **Sunrise Service**

It was Easter Sunday. It was still dark when dad's alarm clock went off, it clanged for what seemed like ages. No one could go back to sleep. Not if they were to get down to Black Rock Point in time for the Sunrise Service, they joined a big crowd of people all singing together and saying thank you for Jesus being alive on Easter Day. Back home afterwards it was breakfast & hot drinks for everyone it had been very cold on the point.

#### **Looking For Letters**

Haffertee & Yo sat at the kitchen table, impatiently waiting for the Easter Day Egg Hunt to begin. Dad told them he had hidden some pieces of card around the house, and each has a yellow letter written on it. If they could find the cards and unscramble the letters they would know where to find the chocolate Easter eggs. So off they went.

**L behind the TV, H under the kitchen table, G in a pile of newspapers, T in the toy cupboard.** Later, everyone put all the cards they had found on the kitchen table and started to unscramble them. 'Hole in the ground' said Haffertee in surprise, 'but where?' he couldn't wait to find the eggs.

#### **Finding The Eggs**

Dad explained that in the garden under the holly bush, there was a round stone and the eggs were under there. Off they ran and there they were neatly covered with sparkling coloured foil. Haffertee gave a shout of delight and fell into the hole. Yo pulled him out as she bent down to pick up the eggs. Then she gave them out. There was one for everyone. Back in the kitchen, Haffertee began to tear at the foil on his egg. He then began to eat it and was soon very sticky and covered in chocolate.

#### **Why Do We Have Chocolate Eggs?**

As he sat there licking his lips and trying to unstick himself, he frowned a little. 'Why do we have chocolate eggs on Easter Sunday, then?' he asked. What have eggs to do with Mr Jesus King?

'Well,' said Yo slowly, 'it's what's hidden inside the egg that matters. Every baby bird starts life inside an egg – and when the chick pecks its way out of the shell, that's a new life beginning.' Haffertee nodded, but still frowning. Yo knew there were more questions to come'.

'Was Jesus inside an egg then? He asked – 'Not an egg' said Dad, Mum joined in. 'You remember Good Friday?' she said. Haffertee nodded, licking his lips. He was thinking about the Hot cross buns with butter.

'When Jesus died,' Mum said, 'they buried him in a cave – 'a hole in the ground'. And on Easter morning God let him out. Jesus was alive again. That's what's so special about Easter? 'God did a miracle with Mr Jesus king ' Haffertee shouted excitedly 'Mr Jesus king came alive again', Good Friday is Bad, but Easter Sunday is good!'

Dad picked up Haffertee up gently. 'That's the truth of it, Haffertee. Haffertee snuggled down into dad's hand, 'There's something very special about Mr Jesus King, something very special indeed.

Give out eggs to congregation.

#### **A Prayer Of Thanksgiving:**

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

we thank you for all your gifts to us in creation, incarnation and redemption.

Above all today we thank you for the promises at the heart of Easter,

the promise that Christ's resurrection is a foretaste of resurrection for God's people;

the promise that Christ's resurrection is followed by the gift of the Spirit to God's people;

the promise that Christ's resurrection is good news not just for us, but for all people.

**Amen.**



## **Hymn: Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks To The Risen Lord (StF 295)**

Refrain:

*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. *Refrain.*

Spread the good news o'er all the earth.

Jesus has died and has risen. *Refrain.*

We have been crucified with Christ.

Now we shall live forever. *Refrain.*

God has proclaimed the just reward:

Life for all men, alleluia! *Refrain.*

Come, let us praise the living God,

Joyfully sing to our Saviour. *Refrain.*

### **Bible Reading: – Luke 24:1- 12**

<sup>24</sup> On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words. <sup>9</sup> When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup> Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

### **Sermon: In the garden**

#### **Introduction/Setting the scene**

Recap of story so far – Holy week.

Sunday - waving of palm branches and shouts of Hosanna.

Monday - turning over the tables in the temple.

Tuesday – Jesus answering questions about paying taxes and his Authority.

Wednesday - Jesus is anointed with perfume by a woman at Simon's house in Bethany.

Thursday - Last supper.

Friday - Crucifixion and placed in tomb.

Saturday was the Sabbath.

Today events are thought to have begun in **Jerusalem's Garden Tomb**. “It's hard to imagine a quiet, scenic garden in Jerusalem, a city like New York that never sleeps. Yet, just outside the city wall, on a busy intersection, is a place that might have been where Jesus was crucified and then buried by Joseph of Arimathea. Here in this garden is a large water cistern, the third largest in Jerusalem at a quarter of million gallons, and a winepress, both vital when growing grapes. Many come to faith here: our Lord God speaks to people in the Garden week by week. To see the empty tomb reminds us of what those angels said to the women who came that first Easter morning: ‘He is not here; He has been raised’ (Luke 24:5-6).

And his is the message of the garden – that Jesus has risen, that death has been overcome; concrete assurance for those who believe.

Without the resurrection, the Christian's faith and hope in indeed in vain. But Jesus is risen”. (Source: Inspire Magazine April 2010)

## Meet 3 people found in or associated with garden Joseph, Peter & Mary:

### 1. Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph was a highly respected member of the Jewish Council. After spending some time in silence at the foot of the cross, after Jesus' death, he summoned up courage and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Once Pilate was sure Jesus was dead. He gave the body to Joseph. Then with his companion Nicodemus they wrapped up Jesus body according to Jewish custom with spices and strips of linen. They laid Jesus in the new tomb in the garden, that belonged to Joseph, where no-one had been laid before. (Sources: Mk15:42-47 and John 19:38-42. Jesus of Nazareth by William Barclay).

### Meditation (No Ordinary Man 59):

It was the least I could do – Joseph of Arimathea

It was the least I could do,  
the very, very least.

And yes, I should have done more;  
I know that,  
no need to rub it in.

I ought to have spoken out before the Council,  
begged them to reconsider,  
publicly declared my faith.

I should have told Pilate of their perjury,  
pleaded with him to show mercy,  
explained what sort of kingdom Jesus was talking about.

But I didn't, did I?

I didn't say anything, just watched and listened;  
I didn't do anything, just kept my own counsel;

I skulked in the shadows,  
observed from the outside,  
bit my tongue,  
and let them crucify the Messiah.

Could it have been any different?

Would my intervention have changed anything?

I doubt it,  
not given the mood they were in  
his fate was sealed long before  
and no one was going to rob them of their prize.

Yet though I keep on telling myself that,  
vainly attempting to excuse my silence,  
it doesn't help,  
for in my heart I know I failed him.

When the chance was there to declare my allegiance, I chickened out  
when the moment came to make my stand, I was afraid.

My concern was all for me, and none for him.

Yes, I know it's understandable,  
that most likely you would have done the same,  
but that's not the point.

It's me we're talking about,  
me who will have to live with the knowledge of my failure  
until my dying day,  
and so that's why I've acted now,  
.offering my tomb to provide for his burial.

It's not much, I realise that,  
a bit like shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.

But it's all there is left,  
some small way in which I can make amends.

A token gesture?  
You may be right.  
A feeble attempt to salve my conscience?  
Most probably.  
But I hope it's more than that.  
You see, I've had enough of hiding,  
    enough of closet discipleship,  
    enough of this faith that's afraid to call its name.  
So I've thrown caution to the wind and nailed my colours to the mast.  
It may cost me my position,  
    it will certainly cost me my friends,  
    it might even cost me my life;  
    but if Jesus could willingly sacrifice all that for me  
    who deserves so little,  
surely I can do something for him who deserves so much.

## **2. Mary Magdalene –**

Having Journeyed with Jesus through the last week of his life. We join Mary at the foot of the Cross with Mary Jesus' mother, John, James and Joseph of Arimathea. She watches Joseph and Nicodemus prepare the body and place it in the tomb.

Two days later, Sunday, early in the morning Mary along with Jesus' mother Mary and Salome were on their way to embalm Jesus' body. Mary was concern how they would move the stone the men had put over the tomb entrance. Went Mary looked up she noticed the stone had been moved. Not waiting to explore the situation anymore. Mary ran to tell Peter the disciple 'They had taken Jesus away and I don't know where he is!'

Mary went back to the tomb with Peter, he went in to explore and found no trace of Jesus, as he went on his way Mary remained in the garden and cried. She decided to peep inside the tomb and saw two angels. As she stood up there was someone behind who Mary thought was the gardener so she pleaded with him to tell her what he had done with Jesus. It was Jesus, he simply said 'Mary'. In a instant Mary knew it was her Lord. All she wanted to do was hold him but he said 'Do not hold me, for I have not yet returned to my Father'.

Mary ran to tell the others the exciting news 'Jesus is Alive'

(Sources: John 20:1-18, Jesus of Nazareth by William Barclay)

## **Meditation (No Ordinary Man 61):**

### **I was shattered at the time – Mary Magdalene**

I was shattered at the time,  
    inconsolable.  
It was as though the bottom had fallen out of my world  
    and there was nothing left to live for.  
How could they do that to him, I asked myself?  
How could they destroy someone so loving and gentle,  
    so caring,  
    so good?  
Yet they had.  
  
I'd seen it myself,  
    I'd watched as he drew his last agonised breath;  
    and it was dreadful,  
    more terrible than I can ever describe.  
It wasn't just the pain he went through, though that was awful enough;  
    it was the isolation of it all  
    standing there before Pilate, alone,  
    forsaken by his friends,

one man against the might of an empire;  
groaning under the lash of the whip, alone,  
no one to offer him comfort,  
no one to bathe his wounds;  
hanging upon that cross, alone,  
crying out in such heart-breaking anguish,  
as though he were separated not just from us but from God himself.

I felt at the time I would never forget it,  
that the memory would haunt me for the rest of my days.

And so it would have,  
unquestionably,  
were it not for what came after.

It was all so unexpected  
suddenly, in the nightmare of my grief, a ray of sunshine,  
and then joy, immersing me in its light.

One moment despair,  
then the stone rolled away,  
the tomb empty,  
the mysterious stranger appearing from nowhere,  
and that familiar voice speaking my name.

One moment tears,  
the next laughter.

One moment death,  
the next life.

And now my heart dances with delight.

I still can scarcely take it in though;  
sometimes I have to pinch myself to be sure it's not all a dream.  
But no, it's true.

He died yet rose again!

He was killed yet conquered death!

He lived and lives again!

I really thought that life was over,  
not just for him but for me.

But I was wrong, wasn't I?

For it wasn't over;  
It was only the beginning.

**3. Peter** – Peter a fisherman hears Jesus' call to leave his nets and boats. He responds I will follow you, Jesus.

For three years Peter follows Jesus, and when challenged declares 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!' Jesus replies 'On this rock I will build my church. Jesus and his followers including Peter and his family arrive in Jerusalem at Passover, during the meal they wonder is there love for me in this bread and wine? At first reluctant Peter allows Jesus to wash his feet.

Events turn against Jesus; he is arrested and Peter is afraid. Taunt from the servants of the high priest of 'surely you must have been with him' see Peter denying he ever knew Jesus. Then their eyes meet across the courtyard and Peter is devastated by his own failure. But even at such an awful time as this Jesus' look of love contains acceptance and hope.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Peter wasn't – he was in hiding along with many of the disciples. But after the resurrection Jesus greets Peter and says 'This is the place, I am the Lord who meets you here.

### **Meditation (No Ordinary Man 60)**

They said he was alive – Peter

They said he was alive! Can you believe that?

All right, I know they were upset, cut up about what had happened,  
but then we all were, each one of us.

We'd all loved him,  
all believed he was someone special,  
all hoped he was the one we were waiting for.  
And we were crushed by what had happened, utterly devastated.  
We understood how they felt.  
But you have to face facts, don't you?  
It's no good burying your head in the sand  
and pretending the worst hasn't happened.  
There's no point trying to fool yourself when you know the truth full well And we knew, believe me, all too well.  
We'd seen him crying out in agony,  
we'd heard him draw his last breath,  
and we'd been there when they laid him in the tomb.  
At a distance, true - keeping well out of sight, just in case,  
but he was dead, there's no question about that.  
So what were they playing at, those women, claiming he's alive?  
They didn't seriously expect any of us to swallow it, surely?  
I guess they'd finally gone over the edge, lost their marbles?  
Women! We might have guessed they'd go under in a crisis.  
No wonder Jesus stuck to men for his disciples  
clear-headed, realistic, down to earth, sensible.  
Jesus alive! We'd like to believe it, of course we would.  
But it's nonsense, any fool can see that.

Later Jesus asks 'Peter do you love me' after being asked three times Peter reaches reality 'Lord you know everything...you know how much I love you!' and receives the commission 'Feed my sheep'.

Peter's journey with Jesus continued at Pentecost the Spirit comes and as a chosen people the followers of Jesus receive his power. Peter preaches and declares (1 Peter 1:3) 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'.

Peter eventually arrives in Caesarea. He shares his vision with Cornelius and his household, and tells them 'God has no favourites ... you can be saved too...if you believe in Jesus'. They believe, receive the power of the Spirit, and Gentiles also become members of the chosen people, 'called out of darkness into his wonderful light'. (1 Peter 2:9) Peter's vision is fulfilled – the gospel is for all who believe in Jesus. Peter declares 'He is the stone that the builders rejected found in 1 Peter 2:7 foreseen earlier in Psalm 118:22. Peter is certain on Jesus the rock I will build my life. Will you? (source: 'Rock' by Roger Jones)

## Conclusion

- Are there times when like **Joseph of Arimathea** you wish that you had spoken out for Jesus. Instead of keeping quiet or biting your tongue?

The risen Jesus longs to free you from feelings of failing him and reaches out to each of us in love today.

- **Mary Magdalene's** journey is one of darkness to light. Mary doesn't understand why Jesus was killed and feels his pain and isolation on Friday. Yet on Sunday morning when Jesus speaks her name, hope is restored.

For those who feel any kind of pain or isolation today. The risen Jesus longs to bring light and hope.

Do you believe like Mary that 'Jesus is Alive' and are you willing to go tell others this amazing news?

- There are those, maybe some of our friends, family or work colleagues who like **Peter** did at first thinks the whole Jesus is Alive stuff is nonsense. We have a responsibility to pray for them and use the opportunities Jesus gives us whether words or actions.

After his encounter with the risen Christ Peter was able to say 'On Jesus the rock I will build my life. Will you? Amen

### **Hymn: See What A Morning (StF 309)**

See, what a morning, gloriously bright  
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem  
Folded the grave-clothes, tomb filled with light  
As the angels announce, "Christ is risen!"  
See God's salvation plan  
Wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice  
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man  
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping, "Where is He laid?"  
As in sorrow, she turns from the empty tomb  
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name  
It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!  
This voice that spans the years  
Speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us  
Will sound 'til He appears  
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days  
Through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty  
Honor and blessing, glory and praise  
To the King crowned with power and authority!  
And we are raised with Him  
Death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered  
And we shall reign with Him  
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

### **Prayers of Intercession**

In these intercessions, to the words 'Lord, come in love' please respond '**and roll the stone away**'

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this Easter Day we pray for your church throughout the world: for those newly baptised and confirmed and for those who renew their baptismal promises at this time; and especially for everyone who seeks to tell others the good news of your resurrection.

Lord, come in love  
**and roll the stone away.**

We pray for your world: for the leaders of the nations and all whose words and actions affect others; and especially for those who struggle to understand the good news of your resurrection.

Lord, come in love.  
**And roll the stone away.**

We pray for those in need: for the sick in body or mind, for those awaiting diagnosis or treatment, and especially for those who, for whatever reason, find it hard to receive the good news of your resurrection.

Lord, come in your love.  
**And roll the stone away.**

Lord, remember in your love all your saints in light and especially those who passed on to each of us the good news of your resurrection.

Lord, come in love.  
**And roll the stone away.**

Mighty God, King of Easter, bringer of joy and hope, take from us our doubt ; make us witnesses of your resurrection as we see stones rolled away. This we ask in the name of your risen son, the ever-living Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

**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 clothes  
where thy body lay.

*Refrain:*

*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.

*Refrain:*

No more we doubt thee,  
glorious Prince of life;  
life is naught without thee;  
aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors,  
through thy deathless love:  
bring us safe through Jordan  
to thy home above.

*Refrain:*

**Blessing:**

Easter joy is to be shared,  
to be grown, to be treasured.  
As we go out into the world and a new week,  
may that joy be our strength, our inspiration,  
and our refuge in trouble.

**Amen.**

*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](mailto:northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk)) know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.