

BASINGSTOKE AND READING METHODIST CIRCUIT

An Order of Service for Easter Sunday

Welcome to our Easter Sunday Service, prepared by Circuit Minister Revd. Andy Moffoot. You might like to find a symbol of new life to have with you for this service, maybe a flower, or an egg (If it's a chocolate one will it last until the end of the service?). Or perhaps light a candle to represent the light and life of Christ.

In this service, though we may be isolated, we are invited, along with Christians across the Circuit, to share in the celebration and joy of the resurrecting power of God's love, demonstrated in the empty tomb and Jesus appearing to his disciples on that first Easter Morning. Across the circuit many different traditions and practices will normally be incorporated into our Easter Celebrations; an outdoor sunrise communion service, Easter morning breakfasts and transforming Lent crosses from symbols of death into symbols of life by decorating them in various ways. We remember how special these times have been for us in the past and look forward to a time when we can be part of them again.

A Call to worship

On this Easter morning we join with Christians across the world and from generations before us to proclaim...

"Christ is risen, **he is risen indeed!** Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; His steadfast love endures forever. **The Lord is my strength and my might, he has become my salvation. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!**"

Singing the Faith 309 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LgE_E7yaz4

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!
The voice that spans the years,
Speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us,
Will sound till 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.
Honour 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!

Prayer of Praise and Adoration and Confession

Lord God, early in the morning, when the world was young, you made life in all its beauty and terror; you gave birth to all we know.

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

Early in the morning when the world least expected it, a new born child crying in a cradle announced that you had come among us, that you were one of us.

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

Early in the morning surrounded by respectable liars, religious leaders, anxious statesmen and silent friends, you accepted the penalty for doing good, for being God: you shouldered and suffered the cross.

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

Early in the morning a voice in a guarded graveyard and footsteps in the dew proved that you had risen, that you had come back to those, and for those, who had forgotten, denied and destroyed you.

This morning in the dispersed multi-coloured company of your Church, on earth and in heaven, we celebrate your creation, your life, your death and resurrection, your interest in us; and so we pray...

Lord, bring new life, where we are worn and tired;

New love, where we have turned hard-hearted;

Forgiveness, where we feel hurt and where we have wounded;

And the joy and freedom of your Holy Spirit where we are prisoners of ourselves.

(A silence)

To all and to each, on his community and on his friends, where regret is real, Jesus pronounces his pardon and grants us the right to begin again. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Reading and Reflection:

Bob Hartman is a Biblical Storyteller. Here he tells the story of the resurrection appearances in the character of the Gospel writer, John (John 20: 19-31) pausing to ask questions of those of us who are listening or reading. Pause and reflect at the questions, if you are with others maybe share your thoughts.

It was evening, but not any ordinary evening. It was the evening of the morning that Peter and I found Jesus' tomb empty. To be fair, it was some of the women in our group who found it first. They raced back to tell us, and we raced off in the opposite direction. His body was gone. There was no doubt.

So how do you think we felt, Peter and I? And what do you think we imagined had happened to our friend?

It was the first day of the week. It was evening and we were hidden away in a room, the door locked tight, for we were afraid that the very people who had put Jesus to death would eventually come for us. But that's not who came, that evening. No. Even if they had planned to surprise us, to catch us unawares, no surprise could compete with the surprising thing that actually happened. For, while we were huddled there, Jesus arrived. That's right, Jesus!

What do you think went through our heads? What questions? What thoughts?

“Peace be with you.” That’s what he said. “Shalom.” An ordinary, everyday greeting. But there was nothing ordinary about this day! Was he a ghost? Were we imagining things? But when he showed us his hands and his side, we knew. It was him. And I can’t even begin to describe the joy we felt. Then he repeated his greeting. “Peace be with you.” And gave us a job to do. “Just like my Father sent me,” he said. “So I’m sending you.” Then he breathed on us, and he said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

[What do you think that felt like?](#)

“Receive the Holy Spirit and if you forgive anyone, they are forgiven. And if you hold back your forgiveness, they are not.”

[What do you think he meant by that?](#)

And with that, he left. We couldn’t stop talking about what had happened. And then Thomas knocked on the door. He was one of our group. One of Jesus’ disciples. And he had a twin brother. So that’s what we called him. The Twin. All right, it’s not that creative. But it stuck. Anyway, as soon as we had unlocked the door and let him in, we told him about Jesus’ surprise visit. How we’d seen his hands and his side. How he’d given us the Holy Spirit, well, everything really. All at once. Like people do when they’re excited.

[Now, if somebody told you that - told you that your friend who was dead was now alive, what would you say? How would you react?](#)

Not Thomas. Nope. “Unless I see those nail marks in his hands with my own eyes,” he said. “And unless I put my own finger in those marks and my own hand in his side, I will not believe that Jesus is alive.” He didn’t believe us. Obviously. Anyway, a week later, we were back in that room. All of us, Thomas included. The door was shut, just the same as before. Then, suddenly, once again, there was Jesus!

[How do you think we felt this time?](#)

“Shalom!” He said again. “Peace be with you.” Then, right away, he turned to Thomas. “Put your finger here,” he said. “Look at my hands. Now take your own hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting. Believe!”

[And what do you think Thomas did?](#)

He believed all right. “My Lord and my God!” Was all he could say. And that just about said it all. But Jesus wasn’t finished. “You have seen me, and you have believed.” He said. “Blessed are the ones who believe, even though they have not seen.” Which is more or less why I have written this book you are reading. When he was with us Jesus did lots of other amazing things to show us exactly who he was. Too many things to include in this book. But the things I have included are there so that you might believe - believe like Thomas eventually did, that Jesus is the Messiah, God’s Son. And that, believing, you might find life in his name.

As I read the story I was particularly struck by the parallel of the disciples being shut away in a building for their safety, self-isolating, just like many of us! And how the risen Jesus broke into their isolation and brought a greeting of peace. "Peace be with you!"

Singing the Faith 305 (HP 202) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0arouoCJ8es>

V1

Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Saviour,
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

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

V2

Vainly they watch his bed, Jesus my Saviour,
Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!
Chorus

V3

Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus my Saviour;
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!
Chorus

Another Easter Story

(If you are reading this story with others, perhaps read through it first on your own and then collect some visual aids to help tell the story to others. Be imaginative and creative.)

Having lived with a genetic condition all his life it became clear that eight year old Stephen's physical and mental health was deteriorating. His Junior Church teacher did her best to include Stephen in the group's activities and to avoid situations which might prompt the other children to make fun of him. One April she gave each of the children in the class an empty egg box and instructed them to place in the container an object that represented new life in spring.

The next Sunday, fearing that Stephen might not have understood, and not wanting to embarrass him, the teacher had the children place all the egg boxes on the desk so that she could open them.

The first had a tiny flower in it. "What a lovely sign of new life," said the teacher. One of the children couldn't help but erupt, "I brought that one!"

Next came a rock. The teacher assumed this must be Stephen's, since rocks don't symbolise new life. But Josh shouted from the back of the class that his rock had moss on it, and moss represented new life. "Very good, Josh" agreed the teacher.

A butterfly flew from the third egg box when it was opened and another child boasted that her choice was the best of all.

The fourth egg box was empty. This must be Stephen's, thought the teacher, quickly reaching for another egg box.

"Teacher, please don't skip mine," interrupted Stephen.

"But it's empty, Stephen." said the teacher gently.

“That’s right,” said Stephen. “The tomb was empty at Easter, and that represents new life for everyone.”

Later that summer, Stephen’s condition worsened and he died. At his funeral all the children from his Junior Church group came forward and each placed an egg box at the front of the church next to his coffin. All of them were empty.

(This is a true story retold by Wayne Rice, Zondervan Publishing)

How does the message of Easter hope come through Stephen’s story?

What does the message of hope and new life mean for us in our lives today?

How might we proclaim and/or demonstrate the power of God’s death overwhelming love, offering hope and new life to our church and wider communities at this time?

Prayer of thanksgiving (Jan Berry – adapted)

Easter God, We bring you our praise and our thanks.

You take the pain of our Good Friday’s the watching of suffering and the waiting for death, and transform our helplessness into the fragile beginnings of hope.

You take the bleakness of our Easter Saturdays, the weariness of defeat and desolation, and transform our despair into the will and courage to go on.

You take the grieving of Easter Sunday morning, the fearful approach to the tomb, and transform our bewilderment into the breathless excitement of new life.

And so with Mary and the disciples, with people like Stephen in our story and his church and family, with all who have wept and been comforted, with all who have mourned and found hope, we sing your Easter Praises! Thanks be to God! Alleluia! **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Option 1: Print off and colour/decorate/cut out the picture of a flower writing on each petal the names of people or situations you want to pray for.

Option 2: *(Donald Hilton – adapted)*

Loving God, we rejoice in the hope that is at the heart of Easter: the rising, the new beginning, the light of resurrection flooding over the shadow of the cross.

We pray for the Church: that we may live and speak as people of the resurrection, showing by our words and deeds the sense of joy and purpose that Easter brings.

But we are too well aware that the light of resurrection is obscured for many by the deep darkness of the shadow cast over our world at the moment.

We pray for those overshadowed by the weight of isolation, sorrow or despair, fear or bereavement.

We pray for those in circumstances not in our news headlines any more, caught in the crosshairs of conflicts or natural disasters.

We pray for key workers in a range of occupations working at personal risk and self sacrifice to care for us and our society.

(Bring before God any others for whom you feel called to pray)

For all, we pray that their shadows may be pierced by resurrection light, and hope spring newly eternal within them.

In the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

The Lords' Prayer

Singing the Faith 313 (HP 212) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbBOOmKMLmI>

(Alternative version for something a bit different for those who use Spotify...

<https://open.spotify.com/album/4PHHboXWjcCQbrnxttqYKt?highlight=spotify:track:69d3LHNceiwnpZGYwICRmu>)

V1

Thine be the glory,
Risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory,
Thou o'er death hast won;
Angels in bright raiment
Rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave-clothes
Where thy body lay:

*Thine be the glory,
Risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory,
Thou o'er death hast won.*

V2

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.

V3

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:

Blessing

The power of the creator who brings life out of death be with you, the risen Christ be your constant companion and the healing embrace of the Holy Spirit encircle you so that you see resurrection light ever about you....and the blessing of God the Father, the Risen Son and the Holy Spirit, remain with us/you now and always. **Amen.**