

Music to start – He's my Light, by Mahalia Jackson, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydUTVu-BtDw>

Welcome to the joint worship for Christ Church and The Bridgwater Drive Church. Today will be a Communion service so please have bread and wine or juice ready for us to share in the Lord's Table each in our own homes.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Call to worship

Hold your head high, Christ has risen.
Rejoice and shout,
Christ has come calling us home.
Home to the heart of God,
Home to God's living presence,
Home to God's banquet feast.

Hold your head high, Christ has risen.
Death has been conquered,
Christ has come calling us home.
All that was broken has been made whole,
All that was dislocated has been set right,
All that was oppressed has been set free.

Hold your head high, Christ has risen,
Bringing God's healing,
Christ has come calling us home.
Redemption is complete,
God's eternal world has begun,
Love reigns over all,
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah,
Christ has risen calling us home.

written by Christine Sine

Hymn Christ the Lord is Risen today (R&S 232) Paul Robinson, used with permission

1 'Christ, the Lord, is risen today!' *Hallelujah!*
All creation join to say: *Hallelujah!*
Raise your joys and triumphs high; *Hallelujah!*
Sing, you heavens, and earth reply: *Hallelujah!*

2 Love's redeeming work is done!
Fought the fight, the battle won:
Lo, our Sun's eclipse is o'er,
Lo, he sets in blood no more.

3 Vain the stone, the watch, the seal:
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
death in vain forbids him rise
Christ has opened paradise:

4 Lives again our glorious King;
where, O death, is now your sting?
Once he died, our souls to save;
where's your victory, boasting grave?

5 Soar we now where Christ has led,
following our exalted Head;
made like him, like him we rise;
ours the cross, the grave, the skies:

6 Hail the Lord of earth and heaven!
Praise to you by both be given;
thee we greet triumphant now,
hail, the Resurrection Thou!

Opening prayer

We are not eye-witnesses to an event, as were Mary and the disciples;
we have not journeyed through a dangerous city
to seek answers or consolation; we have not seen angels
gathering at the rim of this day,
or wept in the garden this morning because we could not find Him.
But we are here to attest to a story that has not lost its power
during twenty centuries of change and conflict.
We are here because those before us carried this story as if it were precious gold;
cherished it as if it were the key to a hidden wisdom.
Sisters and brothers in Christ, take your places today in celebration and in awe.
What you are about to hear again, has the capacity to change the world.
Your very presence attests to the rising up of life
from the tomb of despair, and to the uncontrollable power of God. Amen

written by Ann Siddall

Bible reading: John 20:1-22

Today's lectionary is split into two parts, for the early morning or sunrise service John 20 the first 18 verses, up to the moment that Mary tells the disciples she has seen the Lord, or the version from Mark's gospel that we read at our Zoom Easter breakfast earlier, which ends with the women fleeing from the tomb because they were afraid. Although it seems obvious to us now, neither of these gospel accounts of the three women in Mark, or Mary with the two disciples in John, actually proclaim the risen Christ. Things were still very tentative and unsure. Most of the disciples, in hiding in Jerusalem, knew nothing and were still sad and grieving. We proclaim Christ risen from the first rays of the rising sun on Easter morning – that is not the way it was that first Easter day.

Perhaps we too should be more tentative and unsure. Because we traditionally don't have any services on Saturday, we jump straight from the cross to the empty tomb. From the seriousness of Good Friday 'at the foot of the cross' reflections ending in silence and darkness, to shouts of hallelujah he is risen and joyful hymns. It's a big leap. Perhaps a confusing one. Easter Saturday is generally a day just like any other. You might eat some hot cross buns, but then you can eat them most of the year now anyway! Some people might eat some chocolate eggs, not bothering to wait for Sunday. As a child, it always seemed a bit of a 'nothing' day. It's a limbo day between the Friday Bank Holiday and the Easter Sunday roasts and chocolate. Like the women on that first Easter morning, we have had to observe the Sabbath. We've had to wait not able to do anything before we can creep to the tomb with spices to anoint the body.

In Mark's gospel an angel tells the women that Jesus of Nazareth "has been raised", but they still run away "for terror had seized them". In John's gospel, the resurrection is alluded to by the absence of a body. If this were a murder mystery, would the absence of a body be enough to prove anything?! As a fan of crime dramas, I know that it is nearly always evidence from the body that leads to the identity of the murderer. Simon Peter and the other disciple see the linen wrappings and 'believe' but believe what? In the very next verse is says "as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead." And they returned to their homes without telling anyone.

And indeed, if today they had told anyone, it probably would be considered ‘fake news’ or gossip speculation. Only Mary stays and speaks with Jesus, mistaking him for the gardener and eventually recognising him when he says her name.

And then Jesus says, do not hold onto me. Of course, this is a particularly poignant phrase this year. We are this Easter allowed to meet with up to six people outside, (if it’s warm enough) but we are not allowed to touch them, hug them or hold on to them, despite the vaccinations so many of us have had. Imagine Mary, discovering that her beloved teacher and friend is not dead after all, but she cannot touch him. It is Mary who went and “announced” to the disciples that she had seen the Lord and spoken with him. The disciples went home dejected; the empty tomb not being enough for them to announce the resurrection.

The second part of the lectionary is for Easter Sunday evening. We do not have an evening service. This, I suppose, is the later Easter service. The gospel text given is the road to Emmaus story. We will not be travelling to Emmaus this morning! Instead, we travel a little further in John’s gospel, to the evening of that first day. The doors of the house where the disciples are staying are locked out of fear. The disciples are afraid of what will happen if they go outside. Will they be recognised as followers of the radical who was crucified? Might they be arrested too? As well as being afraid, they are sad. They are grieving, in shock, all their hopes and dreams torn to shreds. And “Jesus came in and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ And after having shown them his wounds, he breathed on them and said, ‘receive the Holy Spirit’. Another thing we can’t do – breathe on anyone! Not even inadvertently. In fact, if we love others, be they family or strangers, the most loving thing we can do is to make sure we don’t breathe on them. To stay out of arms reach. Jesus did quite well with Mary – they met outside and he told her not to touch him, but the first evening in that room in Jerusalem with the disciples, was pretty much a super-spreader event! But what he invited them to spread was peace and forgiveness. On that first Easter day, Jesus brought peace. He brought calm after the chaos of his trial, torture and crucifixion. He brought a message that said, everything will be OK.

The women at the tomb were not ready for what they would find there, they were overwhelmed by grief and the circumstances of having watched Jesus die by crucifixion. With only 24 hours since that horror they are not yet ready to move on from their sense of loss and brokenness. After a year, are we ready to move on from the death and devastation of the pandemic? Do we need a long Easter Saturday to recover, before we can move on step by step? “We are living at a time full of personal stories of loss and selfless sacrifice, along with selfishness and self-interest. [It is only just this week that 24 countries called for a treaty to cooperate better in the future, while in the moment they are still squabbling about vaccine stocks and making sure they have enough before sharing with others.] We see that coronavirus can move into wealthy societies and create havoc, and we have perhaps begun to wake up to the thoughts of what happens when it rampages through poor countries...Jesus’ message calls us to love one another, through thick and thin, and to love our

neighbour as ourself, in all circumstances. This is not a freedom from dying, but a call to a new way of life."

"This Easter, may we find in the resurrection of Christ a way to face the hard realities of life. May it speak to any fear and anxiety in us, or any sense that it is too overwhelming to try to do anything about it, or to help others. Instead, may we be flooded with the reassurance of the power of life to overwhelm" the forces of death and evil. As we heard at the start of our service in the words of Mahalia Jackson, Jesus is our light and our life. Through his death and resurrection we have life in abundance. He is risen indeed, hallelujah!

(quoted section from an article by Chris Baillie in the April edition of *Reform*)

Since we can't sing communally, though some of you may be singing at home, I thought rather than another hymn, we would listen to **Handel's I know that my Redeemer liveth**. I make no apology for the wide range of musical styles this morning, nor that it represents my particular tastes, but surely between gospel, Handel and two traditional hymns there is something for everyone! This version is from Christ & St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Norfolk, Virginia USA, and we have permission to use it. <https://youtu.be/Hu34ERm9TbU>

Affirmation of Faith

As followers of Jesus Christ, living in this world, which some seek to control, but which others view with despair, we declare with joy and trust: **our world belongs to God!**

From the beginning, through all the crises of our times, until His Kingdom fully comes, God keeps covenant forever. **our world belongs to God!**

We rejoice in the goodness of God, renounce the works of darkness, and dedicate ourselves to holy living, for **our world belongs to God!**

As a people called to faithful obedience, and set free for joyful praise, we offer our lives to do God's work, for **our world belongs to God!**

Lord's Supper

Jesus stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And, also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.

He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.

He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.

He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.

For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.

And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,
to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.
For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people
on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We remember with thanksgiving Christ's life here on earth. The lessons of forgiveness he taught us. The peace he shared with us. The healing of troubled bodies, minds and spirits he offered us. Yet his ways of peace were met with violence from power. We recall his suffering upon the cross for our sake, and his glorious resurrection, which promises new life for all. And so we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

And we say together the prayer our Lord taught us. **Our Father...**

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,
and we may be ready to live for you
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine I know that my Redeemer liveth continues

Prayer after communion

Gracious, God, at this table your promise of life is made tangible.
We have rested in the depth of your love;
We have tasted your nourishing, nurturing presence;
Together, at this table, you have offered us life.
Together, by your grace, we accept the life you offer.
And give you thanks. **Amen**

Intercessions

We remember that Jesus and his followers were Jews; that he was killed during the Jewish festival of the Passover. And we remember that through the centuries, our reading and retelling of the Passion of Christ has led to anti-Semitism, by which we are saddened, and so we open our prayers of intercession with words in Hebrew:

Adon ha-shalom, barkheinu va shalom – source of peace, bless us with peace.

O God, with faces touched by the light of a new day,
and hearts warmed by our prayers and praises,
we come before you to pray for the needs of our world.

Into the light of Easter morning
we raise those who are struggling with illness,
with despair over their lives, or with
the breakdown of relationships.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of Easter morning,
we bring those places in our world
where war, violence, poverty and need
are the experiences of everyday life...
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of Easter morning,
we bring the headline news of this week...
we hold in our hearts the pain
of those suffering violence, bereavement or conflict.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

And into the light of Easter morning
we bring ourselves, the private struggles,
the heart's yearnings, the hidden dreams,
the unfulfilled potential.

May the light of Christ shine upon us.
Adon ha-shalom, barkheinu va shalom – source of peace, bless us with peace, Amen.

Hymn Thine be the Glory R&S 247 recorded by Thora

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*

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

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 (inspired by John 20:21-22)

Jesus said: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am now sending you".

He believes in you. The busy world awaits your compassion. **God believes in us.**
Sometimes you will give your best yet fail. **God believes in us**
At other times you will succeed in spite of your stumbling. **God believes in us**
Go gladly, daring to succeed or fail to the glory of God, and then at the very end,
nothing shall dismay you. **God believes in us**
With Christ's own breath within us, we shall travel well.

The help of the saving Christ,
the wisdom of the Living God,
and the support of the loving Spirit,
will be with you every step of the way, now and always. **Amen**

written by Bruce Prewer

Music to end: Easter Hymn Fanfare, Ian de Massini <https://youtu.be/2UIMmWK5hgo>
(for the minister's use only, unless you want to watch the whole of last year's Easter service from Downing Place URC!)

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI licence 63352

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He's my light, written by Mahalia Jackson

He's my light  
The man of Galilee  
And I know  
He's got his arm around me  
I'm glad to say  
That his love is ever true  
How I and mine  
Are his possessions  
And he'll forgive  
All my transgressions  
He died for me  
Like no other could do

He's my light  
My guiding light  
I don't have to worry  
Day or night  
By his light  
He makes my pathway bright  
All the way  
Each step of the way

Oh, he paid that awful price  
That I might have  
A right to the Tree of Life  
And I shall dwell with him  
Forever  
He is my light  
Oh, my guiding light