



He is not here... He's risen!

Good morning and welcome, and a very happy Easter! For all Christians the crucifixion and resurrection are at the very centre of our Faith. The resurrection isn't the end of the Jesus story, it is a new beginning; not just the beginning of a new chapter, but the title page of a new book; a book that has no ending. The resurrection of our Lord is the first fruits of God's declaration, 'Behold I make all things new; a new heaven and a new earth; a new covenant, a new Jerusalem; and a new and living way to enter into the holy city. All this newness has its antecedent in the resurrection.

Also, the resurrection is a sign that God's justice will be served, and his judgement is coming. 'Now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.' (Acts 17).

With this in mind let's read Psalm 98. Doesn't our world scream out for justice, not least our planet, which we have so plundered and abused. Be assured judgement is coming; no wordy reports or lengthy enquiries, just swift and decisive action.

Psalm 98:1-9

Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Amen.

MP 691 This is the Day

This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made,
that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it
and be glad in it.
This is the day that the lord has made,
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made.

This is the day,
this is the day when He rose again,
when He rose again.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day when He rose again,
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when He rose again.

This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came,
when the Spirit came.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day when the Spirit came,
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came.

Let's pray

Dear Lord and Father of mankind, your kindness to us is renewed every morning, your goodness springs from the ground, your justice is like a never-failing stream. But, above all these, you have given us hope; hope of life renewed; the world renewed, a world which cannot be spoiled, which will not grow old and worn. What a wonderful vision you have given us, of a world without sin, without rubbish. May we be inspired today to live the life of that world in this world; to find new strength to fight against sin in all its ugliness and selfishness; and to know that it is only through suffering that we enter into your glory, as Jesus has taught us by his own suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. And so we pray the prayer that he taught us:

Our Father....



For me, Holy Week is a bit of a rollercoaster, maybe it is for you as well. We go from the high of Palm Sunday, through the low of Gethsemane and the cross before we start the upward trajectory of the resurrection and ascension.

Roller coasters rely on a physical property called inertia. At its lowest point on the track the rollercoaster is travelling at its greatest speed, which gives it enough momentum to make it to the top of the highest point. The inertia of the rollercoaster carriage is a measure of its mass (weight). When a heavy object is moving at speed it is almost unstoppable, and very difficult to move off course (it takes a supertanker several miles to come to rest from moving at full speed ahead).

God's plan of salvation had been gathering momentum for millennia, and during holy week events start to move very quickly; the betrayal, trial and crucifixion happen in quick succession; the story is moving apace as it reaches its lowest point.

The gospel story has a huge inertia, with all the weight of Law and the Prophets behind it propelling it forward, and coupled with the great speed that it is travelling through Holy week, it becomes unstoppable; it was impossible that the grave could hold Jesus for long; the resurrection is inevitable, driven by the inertia of God's plan and purpose.

It all goes to show that God's purpose is unstoppable, just as the resurrection was the inevitable consequence of the crucifixion, so the final judgement will be the inevitable consequence of the resurrection.

Jesus Christ is alive today,
I know, I know it's true.
Sovereign of the universe,
I give him homage due.
Seated there at God's right hand,
I am with him in the promised land.
Jesus lives and reigns in me,
That's how I know it's true.

Reading: John 20: 1-18

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and saw the linen cloths, but he did not go in. Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there and the cloth which had been around Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed. (They still did not understand the scripture which said that he must rise from death.) Then the disciples went back home.

Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. "Woman, why are you crying?" they asked her.

She answered, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!"

Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. "Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it that you are looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, "If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned toward him and said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (This means "Teacher.")

"Do not hold on to me," Jesus told her, "because I have not yet gone back up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God."

So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her.



Last week our Reading featured Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, this week it features Mary Magdalene.

Having finished the work that he was sent into the world to do, Jesus is returning to his Father, ascending from the depths of human despair to the highest place. Can we begin to imagine the joy in his heart as he contemplates being at his father's side once again. As I have already said, there is tremendous momentum in this part of the story of our salvation, and yet at this very point the ascension gets put on hold; there is a problem.

There is a woman weeping at Jesus' tomb, she has come to embalm his body, her last act of service and devotion to her lord, the one who delivered her from the grip of seven demons. Like all the other disciples, Jesus' repeated teaching about his resurrection hadn't sunk in, she is inconsolable.

This will not do, this is not a day for tears, so Jesus turns aside from his road home to console this woman, 'Mary.' It is a most remarkable episode in the gospel story, how the whole plan of salvation gets briefly side-tracked, this is not part of the plan, which is why Jesus has to warn Mary not to take hold of him (for surely she wanted nothing more), for he was not yet ascended. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

This episode is a potent reminder that we should not be so focused on our goals, so as to sidestep all distractions. It is often the 'interruptions' to our plans, our work, our service that constitute our real work and true service.



The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's 'own,' or 'real' life.

The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life -- the life God is sending one day by day.

— C. S. Lewis —

Mission Praise 377

Jesus, Prince and Saviour,
Lord of life who died;
Christ, the friend of sinners,
mocked and crucified.
For a world's salvation,
He his body gave,
lay at last death's victim,
lifeless in the grave.

*Lord of life triumphant,
risen now to reign!
King of endless ages,
Jesus lives again!*

In His power and Godhead
every victory won;
pain and passion ended,
all his purpose done.
Christ the Lord is risen!
Sighs and sorrows past,
death's dark night is over,
morning comes at last!

*Lord of life triumphant,
risen now to reign!
King of endless ages,
Jesus lives again!*

Resurrection morning!
Sinners' bondage freed;
Christ the Lord is risen—
He is risen indeed!
Jesus Prince and Saviour,
Lord of life who died,
Christ the king of glory
now is glorified!

*Lord of life triumphant,
risen now to reign!
King of endless ages,
Jesus lives again!*



And now go into the week ahead in peace, as those who have been released from the shackles of sin, to love and serve the Lord, and may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you.
Amen.