

²³ This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. *[Choir/people respond in praise]*

²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

FIRST NEW TESTAMENT READING: ACTS 10.34-43

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Part of the apostle Peter's speech in the house of the centurion Cornelius, the first Gentile recorded in Acts to have come to faith in the risen Christ.

Peter began to speak to those assembled in the house of Cornelius:

'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

'We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND NEW TESTAMENT READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 15.1-11

A reading from the Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: Paul's account of the good news ('gospel') of Christ's death and resurrection, as revealed to the apostles, to many others, and to Paul himself.

¹ I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you — unless you have come to believe in vain.

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas [i.e. Peter], then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

⁸ Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

FIRST GOSPEL READING: MARK 16.1-8

Alleluia, alleluia. I am the first and the last, says the Lord, and the living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.

All **Alleluia.**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

All **Glory be to thee, O Lord.**

¹ When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the

sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?'

⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.'

⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All Praise be to thee, O Christ.

SECOND GOSPEL READING: JOHN 20.1-18

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

All Glory to you, O Lord.

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;

¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'

¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All Praise to you, O Christ.

New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

THE DIOCESAN SERMON PODCAST for this Sunday is by Acting Diocesan Bishop Peter Hill and his wife Ellen. You can listen to or read it here: <https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/sermons>

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND also has an online service from a different church each week. Please go to: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online/weekly-online-services>

REFLECTION

The photos do the talking here - of a very sad Fuchsia by the Vicarage front door, sharply contrasted with the flowers, all ready for brightening up the Feering Easter Garden. The Fuchsia had been doing well, flowering abundantly for most of last year in this sheltered place by our door. We are pretty hopeless at looking after pot plants, and left it out in the winter, thinking/hoping the spot was sheltered enough. It did OK until the snow earlier this year - then, even in its relatively sheltered spot, the snow was too much. It was a lovely plant, so we were very sorry to see it die.

Somehow we couldn't quite part with it, so it stayed outside our front door for weeks, looking very, very dead. I tried cutting it back, in the vain hope I might find some life somewhere - no such luck. Here it's in its pruned state - it was about twice the width and about half the height. A week or so ago I was getting around to digging it out of its pot and getting rid of it.



But just a few days ago, I happened to look at it a little more closely: if you look below, you can see new, green shoots on the main stem, and on some of the lower branches too. Liz and I are so glad we didn't throw it out. There's life in the old thing yet!



No need to labour the point - at times, things seem dead and beyond hope. Yet life is resilient and tenacious, with a habit of surprising you, as this seemingly dead Fuchsia did. It brings to mind my favourite Easter hymn:

*Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been;
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*

*In the grave they laid him, Love by hatred slain,
thinking that never he would wake again;
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*

*Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for three days in the grave had lain;
quick from the dead, my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,
thy touch can call us back to life again;
field of our hearts, that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*

Things don't come back from the dead, do they? Sometimes they do. People don't, of course; for the many thousands of people bereaved over this past year, even the beauty of life reawakening in spring may just make the pain of loss that much sharper. I've had a brief email exchange with a parishioner born in the southern hemisphere, who can't see the immediate connection of Easter with spring, since this isn't the experience of those born south of the Equator. Fair point - but for us in the northern hemisphere it is a 'natural' connection; as indeed it was for the first Christians. After all, the Jewish Passover, from which Easter derives, partly grew out of two key events in Israel's agricultural past: the nomads' springtime move to summer pastures, and the settled farmers' feast of unleavened bread, at the time of the barley harvest (in 'our' spring).

For the disciples, the loss of their teacher and Lord was still raw. Unlike the more cowardly men, the women were brave enough to return to the grave of a condemned criminal, executed for daring to call himself king, defying the might of the Roman state as well as outraging the pious sensibilities of the religious authorities. Now wonder, in Mark's account of the resurrection (the earliest of the four gospel narratives) the women are so stunned and frightened that they rush from the tomb, saying 'nothing to anyone, for they were afraid'. Remarkably, these are the original last words of Mark's gospel. If you read Mark you'll find two further endings, one long and one short, but these are clearly by other hands and aren't in the earliest manuscripts - and when they are, are sometimes marked by the ancient scribes as 'doubtful'. Whether Mark's actual ending was lost, or he intended to end his gospel this way, no one really knows, and (of course) scholars are divided.

How can this be 'good' news? We can always fill out the Easter story by looking at the accounts of Jesus' appearances in the other three gospels; but let's stay with Mark for a bit. Over the past year we may not have run away from confined spaces, but we may have briskly withdrawn, fearing that certain places might become our tombs. At times we have been afraid, even terrified, and most of us have been at a loss for words at times. Yet we 'celebrate Easter', despite or perhaps because all that's happened over the past year. Clearly the women did speak eventually, and were believed - otherwise the news of Jesus' resurrection would not have spread, nor would Mark have written his gospel at all. Other resurrection experiences occurred - the list in 1 Corinthians 15 is in fact the earliest account of Jesus' resurrection, since St Paul wrote his letter in the early 50's AD, a decade or two before the gospels began to appear. These and other experiences were recounted, and then told and re-told, till we have the four different accounts we read now.

The most affecting account is John's, with his moving story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Lord. John strongly contrasts the two male disciples and Mary. As soon as Mary finds the tomb empty, she runs to tell others (in stark contrast to Mark!) then returns to the scene, where she stays outside, weeping. The two men neither weep, nor go and spread the news - they simply go home. It's as if they've turned their backs on the mystery; whatever they may now believe, it doesn't seem to have changed them: 'for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead' (v.9). Yet Mary gives herself up entirely to grief, and stays by the tomb - simply, we sense, because she doesn't know where else to be, and it is still the place closest to Jesus, even if he is not there. And because she 'stays with it', she is enabled to enter more deeply into mystery of that first Easter - and encounters the risen Jesus.

Back to Mark to finish: again in stark contrast, the women don't meet the risen Jesus, but are told pointedly that the one crucified three days before 'is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you (v.6)'. In ways we can never fathom, the risen Lord is always 'going ahead' of us; we may glimpse him momentarily, or sense him at work in people we meet, or in what they say or do. Perhaps we are always travelling to Galilee, where for Mark and Matthew the gospel both begins and ends. Acknowledging our fears and grief - both of which are real - must be the place to start, if we are to encounter new life. Entering the resurrection-life can only come through facing the desolation of loss, grief and fear, and not by attempting to bypass it. Only in this way can we too come to say: 'Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!' May this Easter joy come to you.

PRAYERS FOR EASTER DAY

Let us bring all our prayers and concerns to our crucified and risen Lord.

Jesus, light of the world, we pray for the world for which you died. Bring your life and hope to a world struggling to escape from this pandemic. We pray especially for the poorest countries, and those riven by division, corruption and conflict, where Covid-19 has been particularly virulent. Inspire a spirit of generosity amongst the richer nations, including our own, that the poor may have a chance to live.

Jesus, Lord of life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, bread of life, nourish and sustain the hungry. We give thanks for our food banks, but pray that a more sustained and permanent way will be found to ensure that people do not go hungry in a rich and developed nation like ours. We pray for the nourishing of justice, and for the far too many countries where conflict is rife - Afghanistan, Belarus, Ethiopia and Tigray, Hong Kong, Iraq, Myanmar, Syria, the Yemen. May your Spirit of peace be known throughout the world.

Jesus, Lord of life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, our way, our truth, our life, be with us and all who seek to follow in your way. Inspire and energize your church to reach out to the communities around them, and offer the new life and hope seen in your resurrection. This Easter season, nourish us too with your word; help us to spend time with the scriptures and in prayer, that we may sense your loving presence sustaining us.

Jesus, Lord of life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, be with the lost, the lonely, the anxious and the troubled. We pray for the vulnerable, the housebound, and for all who care for others, often at great cost to themselves. We give thanks for the Coronavirus Support Group in our own villages, and for the many who give of themselves to ensure others may lead better and safer lives.

Jesus, Lord of life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep, we pray for all who are sick, and for all who seek to bring healing and hope, especially for our NHS and for healthcare services worldwide, as they seek to combat the unseen enemy around us. We pray for all who are receiving or awaiting treatment, and for those ministering to them. We pray that our health workers will also receive the care and support they need. In our own community we remember: Korine Briley, David Clapson, Arthur Cooke, Yvonne Driffield, Bryn Gaydon, Roger Green, Hannah and her family, Hillary Russell, Betty Stears, Eileen Walmsley, Tricia Wenbourne and Joyce Willett. May they know the peace and joy of your risen presence.

Jesus, Lord of life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Lord Jesus, the resurrection and the life, we mourn but also remember with love the many who have died, especially over the last unprecedented year. Be alongside all who mourn and weep, as Mary Magdalene did at your grave. Gather to yourself in gentleness and peace all who have died recently; we bring before you especially those from our community: Julie Brown, Pat Cooke, Monica Evans, Bridgette Reilly and Erik Trawny.

Jesus, Lord of life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, Word of life, we praise you that your life infuses all creation. As we rejoice in the countless signs of new life around us, we pray that we and all people may make the difficult but right decisions to ensure life may be sustainable on our planet, for our future generations and for all creation.

Jesus, Lord of life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**