

## Easter Morning Worship Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020

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 2 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!

*Alleluia Christ is risen!*

***He is risen indeed Alleluia!***

Welcome to our Easter morning celebration, & yes, even during this present terrible crisis, I still use the word celebration because the Easter story gives us hope....it reminds us that even the darkest days come to an end. Yes Easter speaks of Jesus conquering the grave, of new life breaking through. As you will know this is our first Easter here in Ards & I have to say I was taken by surprise when the first green shoots began to sprout out here under the trees at the bottom of our garden. All through the autumn & winter the bottom of our garden looked quiet devoid of life..But then came the spring & the green shoots begin to emerge & soon I was surrounded by beauty...

**So now let us pray**– Glory to you O God: you raised Jesus from the grave, bringing us victory over death & giving us eternal life.

Glory to You, O Christ; for us and for our salvation you overcame death & opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit; You lead us into the truth & breathe new life into us.

Glory to You, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, now & forever.

This Easter morning let us pause in quiet & make our quiet confessions to Christ.... If we have fallen into despair, ***Lord forgive us***

If we have failed to hope in you, ***Lord forgive us***

If we have been living in fear, ***Lord forgive us***

If we have forgotten the victory of Christ, ***Lord forgive us***

May now the Living Saving God of mercy raise us from despair, give us victory over sin and set us free in Christ. **Amen**

I pray as we continue to take part in this service now, that God would stir all our hearts so that as we fix our eyes on Jesus, bringing Him our worship that God would raise up in us again in love, faith and hope...

Now lets us raise our voices together in worship as we sing our opening hymn, it comes from our Easter service of a couple of years ago & it's perhaps the most familiar of all Easter hymns so I invite you to sing along with yourselves & indeed with all the choirs of heaven this morning as we declare

### **Thine be the glory risen conquering Son**

Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son:  
endless is the vict'ry 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, conqu'ring Son; endless is the vict'ry 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 conqu'rors, thro' thy deathless love:  
bring us safe thro' Jordan to thy home above.

[Refrain]

I wonder if that hymn brought back some memories. And hopefully it also encouraged you to pray all the more that a vaccine will be found for this virus and that we would at the right time be allowed to come together to sing and lift our praise to God again as a Church family.

We are now going to watch a short video that flows out of the opening verses of Psalm 46 which reminds us that *God is our refuge & strength an ever present help in trouble*. Following our video we will hear our choir share a piece with us from a past Easter service and then we will hear our gospel reading from Mark 16.

**Hymn 'He rose triumphantly'** Choir-  
**Gospel Reading Mark 16:1-8** Heather

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. <sup>2</sup>Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup>and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'

<sup>4</sup>But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

<sup>6</sup>'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

<sup>8</sup>Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

## SERMON

It's an Easter unlike any other.

It's an Easter when instead of the joy of family and church gatherings we are separated.

It's an Easter when instead of having roads bustling with people looking to get away to the coast, we have quiet.

It's an Easter when, for many, the laughter and celebrations have been replaced by nervous anxiety, perhaps even fear.

It's an Easter unlike any other... or is it?

Are we the first to have approached this special day with burdens, uncertainties and fears?

Let's pause and take a look at our gospel reading again. Can I ask you just for a moment to try to put on hold what you already know about the Easter story and concentrate on what the scriptures tell us about how these first followers of Jesus, these women, felt as they approached the tomb all those years ago...and let's see again how they reacted as events unfold.

Mark begins his account of the resurrection by telling us that the women were going to the tomb with spices. Sabbath had now passed and so Mary and others could now do what they had no doubt wanted to do a couple of days earlier.... they could anoint Jesus body and so stop the smell from getting too bad, as his body decomposed.

So let's be clear this morning. The women didn't head to the tomb in hope and they didn't go there to celebrate. They had seen for themselves the awful horror of the cross and in their

minds that was the end. So they were now resigned to what had happened and they were simply going to pay their respects to their master in the way they thought practically best...by anointing his body. Yes that first Easter began with *sadness and resignation*. But then suddenly new emotions burst in on the scene... joy and wonder? NO: *rather confusion and curiosity*. As the women walked, the question on their minds was probably who would move the huge stone and give them access to Jesus' body. But when they reached the tomb, well, that question was made irrelevant. For the enormous stone had already been shifted. The entrance to the tomb was open! And then quickly there came a new set of emotions ....*Alarm & Unease*. For as they entered the tomb, they found they were not alone. There was a young man dressed in white on their right. This was a man they obviously didn't recognise. Who was he?

What was he doing here in their Lord's tomb?

What was going on?

We must remember that these women were followers of a rabbi who had just been condemned and crucified. It would be natural for them to wonder if they were now in danger too. It's no wonder they were alarmed.

Then this strange young man speaks to them and tells them not to be worried. Relax ...no need to be upset....Jesus, who they had come looking for, is RISEN. He's not here, so go and tell his friends, His disciples...especially Peter, who must have been still struggling with guilt over his denials,...tell them the good news. Jesus is alive & he will meet them in Galilee.

And at this point, they jump for joy and start to sing at the top of their voices. Isn't that what Mark tells us? NO rather we are told that these faithful followers of Jesus were *trembling & bewildered*. They didn't tell anybody because they were *afraid*. How real is that? How honest? Yes here Mark gives us a record of the wonderful women's reaction to the news of Jesus resurrection and it isn't all the nice, lovely, easy feelings that we might expect. No, the bible tells us plainly that the women felt confused and afraid. What was going on? Could this be real? This can't be happening...can it?

I would guess that those are the sort of thoughts that have been on many minds in the past weeks...And, yes, we have probably also experienced those powerful emotions of confusion, anxiety and fear. Perhaps today, this Easter morning, you may be sitting watching this wondering what will come next.

Well of course I can't tell you that. I don't know how long we will be in lockdown, I don't know how many people will get sick, but I am convinced that we can, as the song says, face tomorrow and its uncertain days... **because he lives**. And there we have Easter at its core... not a promise that everything will always be lovely or that we will always have a smooth journey in life, but an assurance that the One who has conquered the grave will be with us through whatever may come. He is victorious and he has gone ahead of us. One final thought this Easter morning, you might be wondering why our reading ended with the women still bewildered and fearful at verse 8. Well it's because the most reliable early manuscripts don't have the next portion: Mark 16 verses 9-20. It seems that those verses were added later, maybe because the last page or the end of Mark's scroll had become lost at some point and people didn't want the account to finish with those shaking women leaving an empty tomb.

Of course we just have to read Matthew, Luke or John to discover there was much more to come for those bewildered women and for the rest of the disciples. Jesus would meet them

several times and they would see the evidence of the resurrection right there in front of them with their own eyes.

But this morning, perhaps its right that we pause here at the empty tomb, for in a sense each day all of us who seek to follow Jesus are called, by trusting Him, to add another page to the story. Yes, its sometimes far from easy, sometimes we would just love to see our master there in front of us, just like those first disciples... and Jesus tells us one day we will. But for now we can face tomorrow and the uncertain days that follow with hope for ourselves and hope to share with others ...**because He lives..**

Let's take a moment of silence now and then we will say the Lord's prayer together before Norma leads us in our prayers for others this Easter morning.

**VideoPrayers for Others** Norma Reid

(If you are at home only using this text then just take some time to pray for our Land , our leaders, our Church & those who are ill along for those who work in our health service. Please pray especially for Rosemary Reid & John Tweed in hospital & Elsbeth & Brian ill at home.

Please also remember in prayer those who have lost loved ones this year, especially Ian Stannage, his son Gary & Marie & family. Anne Latimer, Gerry/Jean & Jim & the McIlorum family)

**Hymn**– '*As the day is dawning*' Ian Pope

**Blessing**– Let us live in the joy and peace of the risen Christ. Let us work in confidence, trusting in the victory of his resurrection. Let us look for his coming as one who gives life beyond our hope.

We will all now share the grace together this Easter morning.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all this Easter and for all the days to come. Amen