

## Easter Sunday 2021

Our service today has been prepared by Rev. Dr. Jonathan Pye, Chair of the Bristol District

### Call to Worship

This is the day:

**When tears are wiped away,  
shattered hearts are mended,  
fears are replaced with joy.**

This is the day:

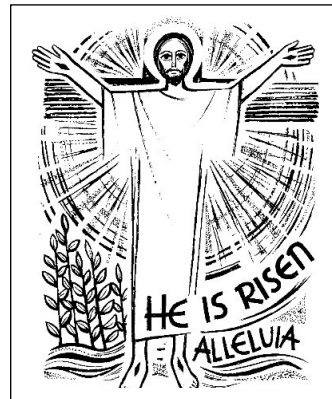
**When the Lord rolls away the stone of fear,  
throws off death's clothes,  
goes ahead of us into God's future.**

This is the day the Lord has made:

**Death has no fear for us,  
sin has lost its power over us,  
God opens the tombs of our hearts  
to fill us with life.**

This is Easter Day!

**Christ is risen!  
Hallelujah!**



**HYMN:** StF 298 *Christ the Lord is risen today* (Charles Wesley)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ss-AOTpCIPE>

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!  
All creation joins to say, Alleluia!  
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!  
Sing, ye heavens; let earth reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!  
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!  
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal, Alleluia!  
Christ has burst the gates of hell, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!  
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!

Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!  
Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!  
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!  
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

King of glory, soul of bliss, Alleluia!  
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!  
Thee to know, thy power to prove, Alleluia!  
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!

### Prayers:

People of Easter, lift up our hearts!

On this day of joy and hope, we sing our praises to you.

Very early in the morning, your Word shattered the silence of chaos, and grace flowed forth like a river.

You reached down and gathered up the dust of creation, forming us into your image and breathing life into us.

Yet the day came when we chose to turn from you, believing our wisdom was superior to your will for us.

You sent the prophets to speak your gracious hope, but we refused to listen. When you could have let us remain in the clutches of sin and death, you sent Jesus to be one of us, so we could come home to you.

Therefore, we join our voices this morning with those who stood at the empty tomb – as well as those of every place and time – singing our Easter joy to you. **Amen.**

(Adapted from *Fire and Bread, Resources from Easter Day to Trinity Sunday*, p.29)

## Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory  
for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

Reading 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.<sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.<sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me.<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

**HYMN:** StF 297 *Christ is alive, let Christians sing* (Brian Wren)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRQoeitN5nA>

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.  
His cross stands empty to the sky.  
Let streets and homes with praises ring.  
His love in death shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound  
to distant years in Palestine,  
he comes to claim the here and now,  
and conquer every place and time.

Not throned above, remotely high,  
untouched, unmoved by human pains

but daily, in the midst of life,  
our Saviour, with the Father reigns.

In every insult, rift and war,  
where color, scorn or wealth divide,  
he suffers still, yet loves the more,  
and lives, though ever crucified.

Christ is alive! His Spirit burns  
through this and every future age,  
till all creation lives and learns  
his joy, his justice, love and praise.

Reading John 20: 1-18

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb.<sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.<sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings

lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes. <sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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.' <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>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.' <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup>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."' <sup>18</sup>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.

Sermon:           *'Do not touch me...'* John 20:17

I want us to reflect this morning on just three words from St. John's account of the resurrection. Mary has gone to the garden tomb, early in the morning. Like many newly bereaved people, she is hoping beyond hope to find again a loved one. The story is a familiar one: confronted by the risen Christ, Mary mistakes him for the gardener. When her name is spoken, recognition comes and in a very human gesture she reaches out to embrace Jesus. It is at this point (John 20:17) that Jesus speaks those three words, so relevant for these strange and troubling times – *'Do not touch me...'*, words that have been the theme of so many famous paintings in Christian art, like Titian's famous painting in the National Gallery – a painting that sustained many Londoners in the dark days of the blitz, when the nation's paintings had been taken away from the capital for safekeeping deep in a Welsh slate mine and only one painting a month was left, of which this was the first, so that at a time when London was devastated by destruction and death people could still see 'beautiful things'. Translating these words is itself quite difficult – *'do not touch me'*, *'do not hold onto me'*, even *'do not approach me'* are all possible translations, but at their heart we know, perhaps today better than any other, the emotion that these words hold for us today at a time when people are longing for that voice which calls them out of their isolation back into community.

There is, in all of us, a deep yearning for connection, for community, for communion. Many people will be desperately disappointed that they cannot mark Easter this year by gathering together with others to share in the celebration Holy Communion, receiving the gifts of God, whose physical presence is made known in bread and wine. But this time will pass, though we must still be patient the outbreak of this virus will abate, like Jesus emerging from the garden tomb, our isolation will end but, just as with the experience of resurrection, life will never be the same, we cannot go back to our old lives – the phrase we are hearing so often today in the media is not 'return to normal' but 'discover a new normal'.

This time of isolation, and for so many around the country and across the world, this time of bereavement, grief and loss, has also made us realise the importance of connection and of what is really important in life. What we will remember, and should remember, is not the panic buying by some that led to empty shelves for many, of the selfishness of those who refused to comply with instructions to stay at home (and we hold in our hearts those for whom this has been a real struggle – the old and the young, the families with little or no space for their children to play, the victims of abuse for whom this time of isolation is a time of threat – all of whose desperate plights we need to keep in mind when all this is over); but what we will remember is our deep gratitude to those whose work we have so often taken for granted in all sectors of our society, from healthcare to refuse collection; the importance of the conversation held with neighbours across the garden fence; the simple acts of kindness and generosity towards others which we have been moved to undertake, or of which we have been the recipients.

If this global pandemic has done one thing, it has opened our eyes to the value of community and connection; it has shown us the possibilities of living in new ways. And yet, even today, still in the midst of our isolation, resurrection is already breaking in – Today is Easter Sunday and new life emerges from the old - 'Christ *is* risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia!'

## Prayers of Concern

Father, Creator of light out of darkness,  
Bringing order out of chaos,  
Giving life to the world,  
We come before you.  
**Let your light shine in our lives.**

Jesus, light of the world,  
Descending into our midst,  
Conquering the darkness of death,  
We come before you.  
**Let your light shine in our lives.**

Holy Spirit, enlightening all peoples,  
Dwelling within us and about us,  
Giver of guidance and all good gifts,  
We come before you.  
**Let your light shine in our lives.**

Father of light,  
Prince of light,  
Spirit of light,  
We come before you.  
**Let your light shine in our lives.**

**HYMN:**        **StF 313** *Thine be the glory...* (Edmond Budry)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tjz4yXUJrgU>

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

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

## Collect

Lord of all life and power, who through the mighty resurrection of your Son overcame the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him: grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ may reign with him in glory; to whom with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit be praise and honour, glory and might, now and in all eternity, **Amen.**

## Blessing

The power of the Creator who brings life out of death,  
be with you.  
The risen Christ be your constant companion.  
The healing embrace of the Holy Spirit encircle you  
so that you see resurrection ever about you... **Amen.**