

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 18th April 2021

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

We continue to celebrate the good news that Jesus is alive.
We are God's witnesses.
In our worship today let us receive the freedom offered through forgiveness, the joy of Resurrection life and the hope of eternity.
'May the Lord give strength to his people.
May the Lord bless his people with peace'. (Psalm 29 verse 11)

Hymn/Song

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, the light of your love shines on, illuminating the places where you are present.
As the bewildered disciples pondered the stories of your appearance, you penetrated the darkness of their fear and doubt with your word of peace. You showed them the appalling marks of evil pierced on your hands and feet. You opened their minds to understand why you had to die to defeat such evil and death.
Increase our understanding, we pray, and open our minds and hearts to receive you, Lord. Speak your word of peace to us and let your love shine on any dark areas in our lives.
May this worship, which we offer in your name, be a worthy response to your love and your sacrifice for us. **Amen.**

Bible Reading

1 John chapter 3 verses 1-7

Prayer of Confession

Lord Jesus Christ, you were put to death so that you would become the Author of life, and you were buried so that you would rise from the grave. You set the dead free by your death, and you abolished the penalty of sin by your crucifixion. With that same compassion that moved you to suffer all for us, hear our prayers, and put an end to our misery with your heavenly joy.

As we confess that we have sinned against you in the past, but now have returned to your mercy once again, we pray that we may enjoy your favour and goodness all the days of our life; through your mercy, our God. **Amen.**

Hymn/Song

Bible Reading

Luke chapter 24 verses 36-48 (continues the Emmaus Road story)

Poem by Amy Scott Robinson from 'Engage Worship'

Jesus in the garden, newly risen from the dead,
who stood by weeping Mary, and who heard the words she said
as if you were the gardener, till at last your shepherd's voice
called her 'Mary' and with one word gave her reason to rejoice,
Jesus in the garden, ever new but still the same,
help me recognise you in the speaking of my name.

Jesus on the journey, fellow traveller on the road,
who met two sad disciples, walking with them as you showed
the meaning of the scriptures that predicted you would rise,
but only when you blessed the meal could they believe their eyes.
Jesus on the journey, meet me where my hopes have fled,
help me recognise you in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus in the locked room, breaking through despair and doubt,
who comforted your friends when they had shut the whole world
out,
who came again for Thomas, and revealed your hands and side
so that he could touch and know you as alive, though you had died.
Jesus in the locked room, breaking through our self-built bars,
help me recognise you in the touching of your scars.

Jesus on the shoreline, cooking breakfast for your friends,
who offered guilty Peter one more chance to make amends,
who filled a net with fish for him, and helped him to recall
the first catch that convinced him to respond to your first call.
Jesus on the shoreline, know my best, forgive my worst,
help me recognise you in the way I met you first.

Sermon

We continue to remember and celebrate all that God has done for us at Easter.

God calls us back to life.

It all began with Jesus Christ crucified, dead and buried who was called back to life.

We celebrate the actual, physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The risen Lord said to his disciples and says to us: "Why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!

If the resurrection is a myth or interpreted as merely symbolic, Christ's death was meaningless and so is our faith.

We don't understand it but we can rationally believe it because of those eye-witness reports.

The message of Easter holds for us a credible mystery.

A mystery well expressed in these words from a 15th Century manuscript:

*"A God yet can he die?
A corpse, yet can he live?
What can mind well reply?
What reason reason give?"*

*God's truth itself does teach it,
Man's mind can only blunder,
And reason cannot reach it,
Believe – leave it to wonder".*

At Easter we wonder at the truth that God called his son back to life and calls us back to life. Christ has blazed a resurrection trail.

He has stormed the prison of death and liberated all it's captives.

Where Christ has led we will surely follow.

No longer is time running out for us.

Christ's resurrection has split the stream of time, now we shall live forever with him.

Death is not it a dead-end but instead the door to eternal life.

So let go of your fears. Death has given way to life once more!

Because of Easter, God's work of restoration has begun, in us and in all creation.

God has raised Christ from the dust of death and breathes sweet life into the graveyard of this world.

Today and every day, the risen Christ is making all things new.

He is restoring our life to what it should be.

He is restoring our life to how God intended it to be.

A life of love, a life of joy, a life of purpose, a life lived of goodness, a life lived for others.

What work of re-creation and restoration do you need God to work in you today?

He will do it, he is doing it!

Let us rejoice today, the risen Christ brings the promise and the hope of real change.

Are you open to that change today?

God calls us back to life.

And God calls us back to faith.

It happened to Jesus' first disciples and it can happen to us.

Through the events of Holy week their faith was shattered.

They saw their Lord snatched from them.

Desertion, betrayal, despair and heartbreak followed.

They thought it was all over.

But now the son had risen and so had their hopes.

A new day brought a new beginning, a fresh start.

Because of Easter, tears of sorrow turn to tears of joy.

Because of Easter traitors like the apostle Peter have a new found devotion.

Because of Easter doubters like Thomas are given greater faith.

Today God calls us back to faith. Are we listening?

In these words of Gerard Kelly's prayer - today:

"May his voice reach you.

In the cracks where you are broken

in the pits where you sink low

in the tangled web of weeds that choke your dreams

in the bitter sharp-edged stones that pierce your feet

in your flaws and in your failings

in your fears may you hear him.

May you come to know the tone of his affection

and recognize the accents of his love"

God calls us back to faith.

And God calls us back to our mission.

For those first disciples, the death of Jesus derailed their mission.

They had no good news.

Were they only to be left with the moral teachings of a dead prophet? The resurrection would prove otherwise.

Jesus was alive - that first Easter brought them new life and new purpose. And a new instruction from the risen Lord:

“Do not hold on to me, Jesus told Mary, 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”.

And with those gathered disciples Jesus explained how

“Repentance and forgiveness will be preached in his name to all nations”. They were to be his witnesses.

There is movement here and urgency.

The news of his rising gave them new confidence, a new passion, a fresh impetus. What about us today?

You know as I do that being a Christian today is not fashionable.

It can seem that the world is against us – or indifferent to our message. We have different values to many.

Our message is counter-cultural and it's hard to make a stand and go against the flow. We can get disheartened..

We are misunderstood, misrepresented and we are marginalised.

And we marginalise ourselves.

But the message of Easter lifts our heads and our hearts.

For today we proclaim with newfound assurance:

We are on the winning side. We are more than conquerors.

Love is stronger than death. We are on the side of truth.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again in glory and we shall welcome that day with gladness.

God has appointed him judge of the living and the dead.

God is Sovereign. His will for creation is unfolding.

Easter is not a time for retreat.

On our Easter faith we stand our ground.

If we are considered foolish – rejoice - we are fools for Christ.

As the apostle Paul wrote:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

We stand our ground. We preach Christ crucified.

We lift high the cross.

The cross of Christ and the empty tomb are not matters of personal opinion but public truth.

So we do not retreat, but advance.

The life and love of Christ cannot be contained.

Jesus could break out of a stone tomb, he can break out of our stone churches - break out of our hardened religion, break out of our fortress like comfort-zones.

Jesus is alive. Let us be alive to his mission, alive to his purposes.

Let us go on.

Listen to these words of Annie Johnson Flint:

Some of us stay at the cross,

some of us wait at the tomb,

Quickened and raised with Christ

yet lingering still in the gloom.

Some of us stay at the Passover feast

with Pentecost all unknown,

The triumphs of grace in the heavenly place

that our Lord has made His own.

If the Christ who died had stopped at the cross,

His work had been incomplete.

If the Christ who was buried had stayed in the tomb,

He had only known defeat,

But the way of the cross never stops at the cross

and the way of the tomb leads on

To victorious grace in the heavenly place

where the risen Lord has gone.

God calls us back to our mission.

God calls us back to faith.

God calls us back to life.

Will you respond to his call?

Will you say yes and follow where he leads?

Hymn/Song

Prayers of Intercession

Risen Lord Jesus you come to us in unexpected places, in our journey, in a crowded room, in conversation, in the stillness.

You come in the midst of our doubt, our fear, our sorrow.

You come in the power of the resurrection.

No pain and suffering is unknown to you.

God of love we pray for your world and your children.

May those who lack be filled, those who mourn be comforted, those who worry be calmed and those who seek forgiveness find it in Jesus Christ.

We pray for countries with surging Covid cases, for those with poor infrastructure and resources, for countries with little protection and no vaccines. We pray for those engaged in trying to resolve such issues.

We pray for countries at war with other countries and within themselves, for their people who fear for their lives and stability.

May dialogue replace violence and bring peace and safety.

We pray for all who grieve for the loss of loved ones, family or friends, near or far away. For the Queen and all of the Royal family in their grief and change of circumstance, some taking up new responsibilities in new ways and with new purpose, and in their support and upholding of each other.

Finally we pray for ourselves.

Help us in our sufferings and trials.

Give us courage and strength to be your disciples and witnesses in all the circumstances of our lives.

May our daily lives show that Jesus is alive.

May we all receive grace and light according to our needs and come at last to share with all the saints in life eternal.

We ask these prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray

The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/Song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.
Living Lord, may we live in such a way that people will see that we
have been with you, and will be drawn to come and see you for
themselves, and share your risen life.
May resurrection always find a sunrise.
May tombstones always find a place to roll.
May journeys always find a garden waiting.
May the God of travellers always find us travelling.
May the blessing of God rest upon us always. **Amen.**

Coffee Time Conversation

- How do you recognise Jesus today?
- What could you do to increase that sense of his presence?
- Ask God for stronger faith, deeper love and increased hope.

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

To God be the glory
The head that once was crowned with thorns
At the name of Jesus

More Contemporary Music:

I believe in Jesus
Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord
There is a redeemer

Keep social distancing.
Keep safe.
Keep communicating.
Keep celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord.
God bless you and keep you until we meet again.
My prayers are with you.
With love,
Peter