

## Service at Home Sheet, Sunday 1st May Third Sunday of Easter

It's still the Easter season, so our opening prayer and hymn reflect the Easter message.

We begin with a **prayer**:

Make this day Lord, a step closer to heaven.  
This day Lord, may I know myself loved and valued.

This day, may I notice the beauty around me in things both great and small.

This day, Lord, may I not miss the messages of joy, of peace, of hope that you send me. Let me live this day in the light of your resurrection. Amen

Richard Sharples (altd)  
(from Fire & Breadc.Iona Community)

### Hymn:

#### When the cold earth feels the sunshine

This morning I have chosen a hymn you probably do not know and for which I cannot find any Youtube performance. It was in *Sing New Songs* which had lovely hymns for use with children and family worship, very much grounded in everyday experience but sadly not included in *Singing the Faith*. Please take time to reflect on it.

- 1 When the cold earth feels the sunshine;  
Probing roots search deep for food,  
Welcome Easter, welcome springtime,  
Jesus lives and God is good.
- 2 When the crocus braves the weather;  
Lifts its head to greet the sky,  
Welcome Easter, welcome springtime,  
Jesus lives and God is nigh.
- 3 When a friendship, sadly broken,  
Starts again its warmth to find,  
Welcome Easter, welcome springtime,  
Jesus lives and God is kind.
- 4 When a family, spoilt by quarrels,  
Cools its temper, hurt removes,  
Welcome Easter, welcome springtime,  
Jesus lives and God is love.
- 5 When the poor, the homeless, hungry,  
Reach for help, no longer sad,  
Welcome Easter, welcome springtime,  
Jesus lives and God is glad.
- 6 When the Church sings Easter gladness,  
Voices raised, a faith to share,  
Welcome Easter, welcome springtime,  
Jesus lives and God is there.

### Introduction to theme

We will have different memories of the traditions our churches and our families followed in celebrating Easter. I grew up in a terraced house in London with only a narrow backyard but at Easter we always stayed with friends on their farm in Sussex. Opposite the farm were beautiful woods; the coppiced hazel trees were coming into leaf, the ground studded with sunny primroses, dainty, dancing wood anemones and shy violets. Every Easter I picture those woods. Some of you will have enjoyed outdoor sunrise services as we did in Derby. At the United Church we have had a tradition of Easter breakfast, followed by hearing the story of the lakeside breakfast, today's set lectionary, whilst fish is cooked over a camping stove. We shared fish as well as bread and wine for Communion. Take a moment to reflect on the Easter experiences that have been important to you.

### Prayer of Praise

Gracious God, we thank you for all the joys of this season: for bright skies and refreshing showers, for trees coming into leaf, for spring flowers and all the signs of new life. Most of all we thank you for the hope the Resurrection brings. Amen

### Reading John 21 v 1-19

### Exploring the Story

The Gospel passage we've just read is one that invites us to use our imaginations to bring the story to life and then to spend time with it. Before we do that I want to share some background to enrich understanding.

### Firstly – Timing: What happened when?

I enjoy Agatha Christie's Poirot – the way all the snippets of evidence come together at the end of each story – I find the way every loose end is tied up very satisfying. I would have liked the accounts of the resurrection to come to a tidy conclusion in the same way. But they don't. For the tidy minded detective there are big questions about this story. The last few verses of chapter 20 read like the

conclusion of the book – and then afterwards we have the story of the lakeside breakfast. So was it added to the book later, though it might have happened earlier? Is this the first one to one conversation Jesus had with Peter after the resurrection – or has there been an earlier one as Paul suggests in Corinthians, and which is implied in Luke 24:34? I spent some time researching this in the Cathedral Resources Centre and found that the experts are just as puzzled as I am.

Timing was certainly irrelevant to John, the Gospel writer. He is very clear that he has not attempted a life history. He has selected a few events and explored their meaning in detail. Throughout his Gospel John chooses stories which have great significance – and every detail in each story is there for a good reason. So it's not the timing but the content we should focus on.

### **Secondly - Translation**

This is a story that loses a lot in translation – because in English we have only one word where the Greek has several different ones. Sometimes the word translated 'love' means the total self-giving sacrificial love – like the love of Christ himself. But sometimes it just means the fellow feeling between good friends – there is no a word in English that fully captures the meaning – friendship is the nearest.

### **Thirdly - Theme**

For some people the main point of this story is to explain Peter's authority in the early Church. Over a rock, typical of one where the meal was prepared, is a church - the Church of St Peter's Primacy.

But for many of us this story is also about our experience of the love of Jesus. If, like me, you have known the experience of failure, or the experience of losing faith and being given it back again, then this story is deeply precious for it reflects a truth we have experienced, a truth we want to share with others grappling with similar problems.

**So come with me in imagination as I tell the story again,** drawing on insights from Tom

Wright, Hilary Faith Jones, and William Temple's classic study of John's gospel.

It was a cold grey morning. They had worked all night – and caught nothing. The cold grey of early dawn matched their mood.

The last few days had been an emotional and spiritual see-saw – one moment in the depths of despair – and the next elated at the glimpse of something wonderful beyond imagining.

Their world had fallen apart as they had seen Jesus arrested and fled for their lives. They had seen him die on the cross – an ignominious end to all their hopes and dreams. Without doubt, dead: blood and water from the spear wound proving beyond doubt that his lungs had filled with water and life was over.

Then - the women's unbelievable strange story of the empty tomb; Mary gabbling hysterically about angels and a gardener who wasn't a gardener - and the moment when Jesus himself had come to them as they huddled in that upper room. He came not once, but twice, and vanished as mysteriously as he had come. For Thomas that second time was enough – he had found a certainty which would never leave him, but not all of them had that certainty.

What next? – confused, uncertain, wondering if they really could believe what they had seen in those amazing moments – swinging between doubt and conviction, they had gone back home, back to the old familiar life.

Peter was the most restless of them all – he had to fill his time – for if he sat doing nothing, the memory of that terrible night in Caiaphas' courtyard overwhelmed him. In his head he heard his own arrogant claim that he would never desert his Lord – and his shameful denial of even knowing Jesus. After the arrest, he had found the courage to follow at a distance, he had waited outside the palace desperate for news – but in that agonising long wait in the shadows, it had

taken nothing more than the mocking questions of a servant girl to undermine his courage totally. Again and again the shame of that memory overwhelmed him – the sound of cock crow, the half light of early dawn – the smell of a charcoal fire. These things brought the terrible picture flooding back. Unable to bear inactivity, he had decided to go fishing – and his friends had come with him.

All night they had caught nothing. Then they saw the figure on the shore, telling them to cast the net again to starboard – nothing unusual in that – it was common enough for a shoal to be visible from the shore, though not evident from the boat. The net was filling to breaking point – and they recalled an earlier occasion when Jesus had enabled a magnificent catch. Could it be Jesus? It was young John who recognised him first, excitedly shouting, “It is the Lord!” Instinctively Peter knew that this was his moment, his chance to find release from the demons in his head. So he plunged over the side, struggling through the water, desperate to reach Jesus.

But there’s no great emotional moment – something much more mundane and calming, the ordinary bringing healing. This time the smell of charcoal is blended with the familiar homely smell of fresh fish cooking. Jesus already has breakfast cooking – but asks them to bring their catch to add to what he has prepared. They even followed their normal routine of counting the fish – and then sat down to breakfast. The miraculous and the ordinary, Jesus’ gift and their efforts, have come together, and this meal brings them wholeness.

Reassured by the warmth and the welcome, the food and the companionship, Peter found himself at last alone with Jesus. He was made to take a long hard look at himself, but a long hard look whilst held secure in Jesus presence. “Peter, do you love me more than the others do?” That arrogant claim thrown back at him. Embarrassed, ashamed Peter can only mumble, “Lord, you know that

I am your friend”. The response is not affirmation or reassurance – but a task: “Then prove it - feed my lambs.”

They walked a little further, Peter lost in thought. Again Jesus put the question, “Peter, do you wholeheartedly love me?” No more comparisons with others, just the straight questioning of his own commitment. Again Peter responded in the same way – no arrogant claim of undying loyalty or passion – simply, “You know I am your friend.” Again the response: “Then tend my sheep.” A bigger task – to take responsibility for guiding the mature as well as the young.

There were three denials – so it’s inevitable there were three questions – but this time Jesus used the same word as Peter had used – challenging him to consider even that lower level of commitment seriously. Are you truly my friend? Peter was shaken by this third question – he knew he’s failed as a friend, his every waking moment has been overwhelmed by the shame of it – and he knew how desperately he needed to be sure that he is forgiven. His response showed just how far he has come on the road to knowing his own weakness and his need of Jesus – “Lord you know everything – you know me through and through – you can see that I am truly your friend.” Again a challenge – ‘feed my sheep’, and even when the going gets terribly tough, ‘follow me’.

### **A commission to lead, and to walk Jesus’ own way of suffering love.**

So those confused disciples were given a way to move forward to a future - a future where they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit, where they would all proclaim Jesus’ resurrection power, and walk Jesus’ way of suffering love.

Much of the conversation was uniquely Peter’s. But the final question and the final challenge are for anyone who seeks to be counted among Jesus’ friends.

Are you truly my friend?

When the going gets tough, follow me.

## Hymn: God came in Jesus

(tune: Morning has broken)

God came in Jesus, human life sharing,  
gave his life for us, suffered and died  
Then resurrection! Death could not hold him,  
By love's perfection death was defied.

Then as they waited. all of a sudden  
Strong and elated, free of all cares.  
With no misgiving, joyful apostles  
Knew that his living Spirit was theirs.

So let us greet his coming among us  
Let us still meet his love with delight  
Through Resurrection, joyfully taking  
Love's new direction flooded with light.

He will be coming, mighty and glorious,  
Universe humming, loud in acclaim;  
Through resurrection, all of creation  
Brought to perfection praising his name.

Alan Gaunt

c. Methodist Church, Division of Education & Youth

## Prayer

They had been frightened,  
not knowing what to believe,  
suddenly He was there  
on the familiar seashore  
inviting them to join him  
for a simple breakfast.

Still He comes  
to those who will receive Him.  
He comes as one who knows  
our innermost needs,  
our deepest fears,  
our most secret sins.  
He comes as the great Healer,  
the loving Saviour,  
to make us whole people  
and lead us from our petty little worlds  
into new adventure.

He comes as one who has fought evil,  
and prevailed,  
who has suffered without being destroyed,  
who has died and risen again.  
He comes, telling us to have  
for whatever lies ahead  
He will be in it with us  
always.

Edmund Banyard: Reaching for the Infinite

## Prayers for Others

Gracious God,  
sometimes the news headlines make it hard  
to hold on to faith, hard to believe in the  
ultimate victory of good over evil, hard to  
hold on to the hopes of the Resurrection. So  
in quiet, let us each bring before God one  
situation in the news that troubles us, one  
place of suffering that distresses us, and at  
the same time hold on to the picture of the  
Risen Christ, arms outstretched in blessing.

Now come closer to home and bring one  
concern about a situation in our own city or  
locality and visualise Jesus walking our  
streets . . . . . and again, picture them, and  
picture Jesus, or picture light surrounding  
them, whatever image you find helpful.

Now bring to God the people you know  
personally who need your prayers today and  
again, picture them, and picture Jesus, or  
picture light surrounding them, whatever  
image you find helpful.

Join in the words of an Easter blessing, for  
those you have prayed for, and for yourself:

**The power of the Creator, who brings new  
life, surround us.**

**The risen Christ be our constant companion.**

**The healing embrace of the Holy Spirit  
encircle us so that we see resurrection ever  
about us. Amen .**

(Fire and Bread. The Iona Community)

Bibliography: Hilary Faith Jones, Awakenings, The  
Leprosy Mission; Tom Wright, John for Everyone:  
William Temple Readings in St Johns Gospel

Church Copyright Licence No 30794