

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 3rd March 2024

Easter 4

Prepared by the Revd Peter Rayson

We begin with the triumphant Easter cry!

“Alleluia! Christ is Risen!”

“He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

Listen, sing or read Singing the Faith 94, “To God be the glory”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vbGFupxwu0>

1 To God be the glory, great things he has done!

So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;

and give him the glory -- great things he has done!

2 O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God!

And every offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:

3 Great things he has taught us, great things he has
done,

and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:

Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820-1915)

Pray The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Amen.

Now read the following passages of scripture, which are the set readings for this Sunday.

Acts 4:5-12, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

⁵The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are being asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’

¹²“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

1 John 3:16-24, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

¹⁶We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. ¹⁷How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God, ²²and we receive from

him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

John 10:11-18, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

In the Gospel reading, when he speaks of being willing to die for one's friends, Jesus is clearly speaking of himself but, if we follow him, we are called to seek to emulate him and therefore we too are called to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the greater good; willing, but not overenthusiastic, remember Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-39). The epistle builds on this idea, that followers of Christ should be willing to die for the sake of others but it will help us to understand John's meaning better if we look a little at the historical context. Since the time of Christ, his followers had been persecuted by the Jewish

authorities but by the time this letter was written, things were much worse. Due to the perceived threat to the stability of the Empire, the Romans, expelled the Jews from Rome in AD49 and then in AD70, they were expelled from Jerusalem too and the Temple destroyed. As far as the Romans were concerned, this “cult of the Nazarene” was another troublesome Jewish cult. So, Christ's followers found themselves attacked, verbally and physically, from all sides. Being faced with having to choose whether to give your own life in order to protect fellow Christians was a real possibility and significant numbers did indeed die for the sake of other believers.

However, there is a big difference between being willing to die for your faith and seeking to do so. In Matthew 10, while warning his apostles that they will face persecution, Jesus specifically tells his followers that they should flee from that persecution, not fight it. However, Jesus also brings the promise of eternal life and, in the early Church, there was the temptation to try to obtain that promise sooner by actively seeking martyrdom, so much so that towards the end of the second century both Clement and Origen had to issue edicts against doing so.

It is, of course, true that Jesus brings to all the offer of eternal life - and in this we rejoice - but the Gospels tell us that he actually spent most of his ministry seeking to make things better for people in this life. This life is not a waiting room or staging post or even a testing ground for the next. This life is a God-given gift to each and every one of us and it is up to us to make that life the best that it can be, for both ourselves and for others. If it is all about the next life, why bother feeding the hungry or healing the sick or clothing the naked? Surely it would be better not to intervene and get them to the next life sooner?

If this had been the message of the Gospel, Christianity would have died out a long time ago. Indeed, it would

have literally killed itself off. Fortunately for us, the apostles, and the Church Fathers, knew better. In the passage from Acts, Peter and John had been arrested but what had they been arrested for? For having the audacity to heal a lame man in public. They knew that the Gospel they were called to proclaim was about the fullness of life in this world, not just the next. While Jesus opened that door to the next life, he also wants us to enjoy this life, as his ministry also shows; he even provided wine for a wedding. He also knew, and showed us, that the way to enjoy this life to its fullest is by working together, in support of one another, meeting each other's needs and sharing in the bounty of God's creation and then sharing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter and John did not preach first and then heal the lame man; they healed the lame man first, then preached.

As Christ's followers, we are called to do likewise, to show God's love to one another in our communities, to be willing to give of ourselves to improve the life of others, and then to share the Good News so that others may be inspired to do the same.

That day, aided by the Holy Spirit, Peter and John brought five thousand new believers to Christ because they noticed and were willing to help one man in need. Many thousands had walked past that day but it was Peter and John who noticed him and responded to his need. As the Methodist people, this is not just our scriptural history but the history of our own movement; reaching out to people where they are and offering them the Gospel in deeds as well as words. John Wesley recognised that this was the way to fulfil our calling to both mission and evangelism. As he famously said, "One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that one part of the world does not know what the other suffers." Wesley preached and his preaching reached many people but, for example, he

also set up schools and pharmacies. He knew that minds and bodies mattered as well as souls. As the people called Methodists, it has always been our calling to preach the gospel among people, not just to them and if Methodism is to have a future, I believe that it is to this that we must return.

Listen, sing or read Singing the Faith 277, "My song is love unknown."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWRcAa-nFIA>

- 1 My song is love unknown,
my Saviour's love to me,
love to the loveless shown,
that they might lovely be.
O who am I,
that for my sake
my Lord should take
frail flesh and die?
- 2 He came from his blest throne,
salvation to bestow;
but they made strange, and none
the longed-for Christ would know.
But O my Friend,
my Friend indeed,
who at my need
his life did spend!
- 3 Sometimes they strew his way,
and his sweet praises sing;
resounding all the day
hosannas to their King.
Then 'Crucify!'
is all their breath,
and for his death
they thirst and cry.
- 4 Why, what has my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
he gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries!

Yet they at these
themselves displease,
and 'gainst him rise.

5 They rise, and needs will have
my dear Lord made away;
a murderer they save,
the Prince of Life they slay.
Yet cheerful he
to suffering goes,
that he his foes
from thence might free.

6 In life no house, no home,
my Lord on earth might have;
in death, no friendly tomb
but what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
Heaven was his home;
but mine the tomb
wherein he lay.

7 Here might I stay and sing,
no story so divine:
never was love, dear King,
never was grief like thine!
This is my Friend,
in whose sweet praise
I all my days
could gladly spend.

Samuel Crossman (c. 1624-1683)

A prayer:

Let us give glory to God on high, from whose fullness
we have all received grace upon grace.
For the holy Church of God throughout the world, that
with one heart we may rejoice in the Word made flesh,
let us pray to the Lord: Lord have mercy.
For goodwill on the hearts of all, and on earth, peace,
let us pray to the Lord: Lord have mercy.
For the poor, the outcast and the homeless; for the
helpless, the lonely and the unloved,
let us pray to the Lord: Lord have mercy.

For all who have gone before us, whose hope was in the
Word made flesh,
let us pray to the Lord: Lord have mercy.
*Pray for any specific needs of your own or of others you
know, ending with,*
let us pray to the Lord: Lord have mercy
With all the saints terrestrial and all the hosts of
heaven,
let our voices rise to praise God's glory. **Amen.**

Hymn, Singing the Faith 305, "Low in the grave he lay"
<https://www.facebook.com/HymnsOfPraise1/videos/6430842703647714/>

1 Low in the grave he lay,
Jesus, my Saviour,
waiting the coming day,
Jesus, my Lord:
Up from the grave he arose,
with a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives for ever with his saints to reign:
He arose! He arose!
Alleluia! Christ arose!

2 Vainly they watch his bed,
Jesus, my Saviour;
vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus, my Lord:

3 Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
he tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord:

Robert Lowry (1826-1899)

A blessing:

May the power of the risen Christ strengthen and
confirm you in your faith and the power of the Holy
Spirit guide you in all you do. May the blessing of God,
your creator, redeemer and guide be upon you always.
Amen.

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