

## BASINGSTOKE AND READING METHODIST CIRCUIT

Easter Sunday

*What does the empty tomb mean for us?*

### Welcome and Notices: **steward**

Wherever you are sharing in this Easter Sunday Service, whether you are alone or sharing in this service with others, a warm welcome to you. Today, we are invited to enter into the joy and wonder of the resurrection and the presence of the risen Lord. Like the women who went to the tomb to honour Jesus with spices, God draws us away from the empty tomb to discover the risen Christ himself leading us into new ways of living after his crucifixion.

### Call to worship

*Some words from Psalm 118:1-2 & 24*

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever!

Let God's people say,

"His steadfast love endures forever."

This is the day that the LORD has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

*Let us pray:*

Risen and exalted LORD,  
in the stillness and wonder of this moment,  
we hardly dare to believe that you are indeed alive!  
Yet, our hearts are filled with faith, hope, and love,  
and our souls are beginning to believe.  
Living LORD, Jesus Christ,  
we bring you our thanks and praise. **Amen**

*Roots Magazine (adapted)*

*We sing together our Opening Hymn: StF 298/HP 193: Christ the Lord is risen today;  
Charles Wesley (1707 - 88)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sj9ljVsfk>

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!  
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!  
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!  
Sing, ye heavens, and 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 hath 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 hath 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!

**Prayer of Approach and Adoration:**

Creator God, giver of life;  
Jesus Christ, LORD of life;  
Holy Spirit, the breath of life:  
we bring you our 'alleluias'  
for the joy, the hope, and the wonder  
of the empty tomb.

Self-giving God,  
we thank you that our faith is not founded on mere speculations  
of human wisdom.  
But our faith is rooted in what individuals have seen and heard,  
in the living testimony of ordinary people like us,  
who have encountered the risen Christ.  
In Jesus,  
    you came,  
    you lived,  
    you died,  
    you rose again,  
making yourself known to us by your Spirit throughout history.  
For all who saw for themselves and passed the message on,  
receive our thanks.  
And for all that we experience today of your continuing love  
and your life-giving purpose, we give you our praise in joyful worship,  
through Jesus Christ, our risen, victorious Saviour. **Amen**  
*Nick Fawcett 2003 (adapted slightly)*

**A prayer of confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Risen LORD, we are sorry for the times  
when we stay in the tomb of unbelief and fear.  
We are sorry for the times we are skeptical  
when others share the power of the Resurrection in their lives.  
We are sorry for the times when we live as if there were no Easter.  
**Forgive us, and release us to be your witnesses in the world today.**

Ever-giving God,  
thank you, that in Jesus, death is overcome:  
We are freed from sin: we have new life in Him:  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!  
**Jesus is alive! Amen**

*Roots Magazine (adapted)*

*We share together in "The Lord's Prayer"*

Children's address:

The Christian Story of Easter  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wnbo2AmS3OI>

**OR**

**A Reflective Illustration:**

High up on the moors in the winter season, men go out and set fire to the old heather.

By now the heather is all twisted and gnarled; it no longer produces food for the birds and even the moorland sheep are in danger of pulling their teeth out tugging at it.

The heather has become useless to the life it usually sustains. So it is burnt, but with controlled burning. In the flames, it may look as if it is totally destroyed but it is not.

Under the ground its roots are safe and the men make sure the fire is not too fierce to reach the roots.

In the spring the old heather is gone but little shoots appear.

The heather is rising from the earth and soon will appear as fresh and as useful as ever.

What was destroyed is back with the newness of life.

We sing together our **Second Hymn**: StF 305 / **HP 202**: Low in the grave he lay,  
Robert Lowry (1826 - 99)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kown2rxc0M>

Low in the grave He lay Jesus my Savior! Waiting the coming day Jesus my Lord!  <i>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 forever with His saints to reign He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!</i>	Vainly they watch His bed Jesus, my Savior! Vainly they seal the dead Jesus my Lord!  Death cannot keep his prey Jesus, my Savior! He tore the bars away Jesus my Lord!
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### Readings:

- Epistle - 1 Corinthians 15:19-26
- Gospel - Luke 24:1-12

**Homily:** *What does the empty tomb mean for us?*

*"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! (Luke 24:5b - 6a)"*

I invite you to imagine that you are one of the women who cared for Jesus – to spend the next few moments putting yourself in this role.

And now, through senseless and unspeakable cruelty, your revered and beloved leader and Lord, is dead.

As far as you are concerned, the world has ended – and you feel hopeless. Yet, to honour Jesus' body, and out of pure devotion, you go to the tomb taking spices and ointments.

You are grief-stricken. Your eyes still full of tears – the journey to the grave is difficult.

When you arrived, the tomb is empty...apart from the strips of linen carelessly discarded, as well as, the burial cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head is neatly folded-up by itself, separate from the linen (according to John's Gospel).

You are terrified. Perplexed. Amazed. All at the same time. You do not know what to make of all that you have seen and heard.

You had thought this was the definitive end. As far as you were concerned, there was no meaningful tomorrow. But something has happened beyond your human ability to grasp. The stone had been rolled back, the tomb is empty, the linen cloths crumpled, your crucified Lord and leader has left behind, the trappings of death.

What does the empty tomb mean? Does this mean Jesus is in fact alive? This is certainly uncharted waters. God, yet again, has confounded human expectations — all that happened next at the tomb confirms that Jesus is indeed alive.

It is strange that however many years we have travelled with God, experience God's presence, believed we have known God's ways — we can still be left perplexed and amazed. Tragedy and hopelessness can shatter our world. We can feel that life has ended. And yet, in the midst of it all we can discover God bringing us through to the other side.

The price of God's new life is always the same: a letting go of our fixed, pre-packaged ideas of what God is like, of what we are like and of what our neighbour is like. It is a call to get out of the safety of the boat and to walk on uncharted waters. Even, perhaps, to surf adventurously down cascading waterfalls, having no idea where we are going. The only certainty is knowing in our heart of hearts that 'God is with us'.

There can be no end to our human ability to describe God's power. In the death and resurrection of His Son, God shatters the bounds of our human knowing. The mystery of the empty tomb is that nothing, not illness, death, cruelty, deception, denial, betrayal (and whatever you may wish to add to this list) can separate us from the love of God and God's gift of newness of life.

The Apostle Paul in (1 Corinthians 15:19 says, '*If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied*'. Paul does not go on to say: 'we are most to be pitied...because we would not go to heaven'. No! Paul's picture of the resurrection of Jesus is not just a solution to a personal problem of life and death — rather, Paul's picture of Jesus' resurrection is cosmic and universal in its scope — it is about fixing everything and returning everything to the way God intended it.

If this cosmic restoration of everything as it pertains to Christ's resurrection is not in our vision — and therefore drive who we are and how we live our lives — then maybe, our hope of the Resurrection is too small.

There is a story in the Celtic tradition: A man was once asked, 'What do you gain by regularly praying to God?' The man replied, 'Nothing...but let me tell you what I lost: anger, ego, greed, insecurity and fear of death. Sometimes the answer to our prayers is not gaining but losing, which ultimately is the gain.'

Friends, is this a clue into resurrection living? Dying, to discover more spacious living?

For as in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. **Amen**

### ***The Offering of our lives and gifts***

Risen Jesus,  
on this day we are very aware  
of what you have done for us.  
We want to show our gratitude  
by giving you the gifts of our lives.  
Take our gifts of money, time and talent,  
bless them and use them in your service.  
Accept us too, and bless us and use us in your work. **Amen**

We sing together our **Third Hymn: StF 38 / HP 256: He is Lord, he is Lord, Anonymous**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kxwzmr\\_aWx8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kxwzmr_aWx8)

He is Lord, he is Lord, He is risen from the dead, and he is Lord! Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.  He is King, he is King, He will draw all nations to him, He is King; and the time shall be when the world shall sing That Jesus Christ is King	He is love, He is love He has shown us by his life that he is love; All his people sing with one voice of joy That Jesus Christ is love.  He is Life, he is Life, He has died to set us free and He is life; And he calls us all to life evermore For Jesus Christ is Life.
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### **A Prayer of Praise**

Risen and exalted LORD,  
we praise you that from the silence of an empty tomb,  
a message of joy has spread around the world.  
From the inhumanity of death on a cross,  
healing love has touched the whole of creation.  
From the initial uncertainty of the first disciples,  
your Church has grown and reached out to all nations.  
Thank you living LORD for your self-giving love on the cross.  
*Roots Magazine (adapted)*

### **Prayers of intercession:**

*Roots Magazine (slightly adapted)*

Let us pray for those for whom today is just another day:  
those who have to work;  
those who have not yet encountered the risen Christ;  
those who do not celebrate his love.  
For God gave his Son,  
**to show his love and bring life.**

We pray for all who flee their homes in desperation,  
and travel into an uncertain future...  
Strengthen them on their journeys,  
and keep alive their vision  
of finding a secure and welcoming home.  
For God gave his Son,  
**to show his love and bring life.**

Let us pray for those who grieve today:  
those recently bereaved;  
those for whom this is a time of anniversary;  
those who wait beside a loved one who is dying...  
For God gave his Son,  
**to show his love and bring life.**

Let us pray for all in need throughout the world:  
those without access to clean water...  
those with insufficient food...

those who cannot access the health care that they need.

For God gave his Son,

**to show his love and bring life.**

*You may wish to offer other prayers to God...  
or, invite the congregation to offer their own prayers  
in the quietness of their hearts...*

Let us pray for each other and for ourselves,  
that we may have wholeness, peace, and hope  
through the presence of the risen Christ in our lives.

For God gave his Son,

**to show his love and bring life.**

Merciful Father, accept our prayers,

through Jesus Christ your Son, our risen and exalted LORD. **Amen**

We sing our **Closing Hymn: StF 313 / HP 212:** Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
Edmond L. Budry (1854 - 1932), tr. Richard B. Hoyle (1875 - 1939)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaoV5w2Qfaq>

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

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

### **Closing Prayer and Blessing**

Christ our risen and exalted King  
make *you/us* faithful and strong to do his will  
that *you/us* may reign with him in glory;  
and may almighty God bless *you/us*,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Alleluia!

Go in joy and peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ. Alleluia!**