**COVENANT COMMUNITY ONLINE SERVICE**

*PRESENTER: Revd Dr Calvin T Samuel*

**5th Sunday of Easter**

*Sunday, 10th May 2020*

**~ Journeying to Pentecost 1 ~**

**Welcome & Introduction**:

Good Morning. Welcome to this covenant community online service for the 5th Sunday of Easter. My name is Calvin Samuel and I’m Methodist minister for the towns of Rochford and Rayleigh in the County of Essex. We are internationally dispersed because of the global pandemic but we come together in worship as a covenant community.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**Hymn : He has risen, he has risen,** (StF 302)

 *He has risen, he has risen,*

*he has risen, Jesus is alive.*

When the life flowed from his body,

seemed like Jesus’ mission failed.

But his sacrifice accomplished,

victory over sin and hell.

In the grave God did not leave him,

for his body to decay;

raised to life, the great awakening,

Satan’s power he overcame.

If there were no resurrection,

**﻿**we ourselves could not be raised;

but the Son of God is living,

so our hope is not in vain.

When the Lord rides out of heaven,

mighty angels at his side,

they will sound the final trumpet,

from the grave we shall arise.

He has given life immortal,

we shall see him face to face;

through eternity we’ll praise him,

Christ, the Champion of our faith.

*Gerald Coates, Noël Richards & Tricia Richards*

Last week we spoke of being filled with the Spirit, an experience which the Church first encountered at Pentecost. Pentecost is the conclusion of the season of Easter, and occurs 50 days after Easter Sunday. So we are on a journey from Easter to Pentecost and over the next few weeks we will be exploring that theme of journeying to Pentecost. We want to move from the celebration of being raised with Christ in his resurrection through to being sent by Christ in the power of his Spirit to live and to bear witness to that resurrection life in the world. But it was a journey and the first disciples spent most of that time learning form Jesus and praying with one another.

Today as we come to our prayers I’m delighted that some members of our uniformed organisations, Cubs and Brownies, Guides and Scouts will be helping to lead this service. They will lead us now in prayer. I invite you to respond using the words in yellow which appear on your screen.

**PRAYERS**

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

Help us to remember you are here with us.

May we pray you in faith

sing your praise with gratitude

and listen to your word with eagerness

through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins to God:

*Silence*

For our foolishness

and our thoughtless use of the gifts of your creation,

Lord, have mercy **Lord, have mercy.**

For our neglect of you

and our failure to care for others

Christ, have mercy **Christ, have mercy.**

For our selfishness in prayer

and our carelessness in worship

Lord, have mercy **Lord, have mercy.**

*Silence*

Here is good news for all who put their trust in Christ.

Jesus says: ‘Your sins are forgiven.’

**Amen. Thanks be to God**

**Hymn : Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you (STF 64)**

Praise is rising, eyes are turning to You, we turn to You
Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for You, we long for You

'Cause when we see you we find strength to face the day.
In your presence all our fears are washed away, washed away,

*Hosanna, Hosanna You are the God who saves us
Worthy of all our praises Hosanna, Hosanna
Come have Your way among us We welcome You here, Lord Jesus*

Hear the sound of hearts returning to You, we turn to You
In Your Kingdom broken lives are made new, You make us new

'Cause when we see you we find strength to face the day.
In Your presence all our fears are washed away, washed away

Hosanna, hosanna…*﻿*

*Brenton Brown and Paul Baloche*

**SCRIPTURE**

The journey from Easter to Pentecost is a recurring cycle of transformation and growth. Transformation, first of all, we see in the resurrection of Jesus. It changes everything. From that time onwards Christians baptised new believers and in so doing they invited them to share in the death of Jesus so that they could also share in his resurrection life.

Baptism is a moment of transformation. So seriously did early Christians take this that whole families were baptised, including young children. Some parts of the church, including my own, continue this practice of baptising infants, and in so doing we actually baptise a child into death. When someone is covered by the waters of baptism, whether that is by full immersion or sprinkling, that action is symbolic of being buried with Christ, in faith that as we who are baptised share in the death of Christ so also might we share in his resurrection life.

Easter begins with a moment of transformation. But it is followed by a period of growth. 2 weeks ago we encountered Jesus opening the scriptures for the two disciples with whom he walked along the road to Emmaus. Over the next few weeks we shall be looking at a number of similar stories in scripture which what was Jesus doing in the 40 days between his resurrection and ascension. So let us now listen to the word of the Lord from Psalm 31 and Luke 24.

**Psalm 31.1–5 & 15–16**

*In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.*

*You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.*

*Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.*

*My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*

**Luke 24.36–49**

*While the disciples were talking, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.*

*Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn : Father of kindness you have poured out grace**

Father of kindness you have poured out grace

You brought me out of darkness, You have filled me with peace

Giver of mercy, You're my help in time of need
Lord I can't help but sing

*Faithful, You are. Faithful, forever, You will be. Faithful, You are.*

*All Your promises are Yes and Amen. All Your promises are Yes and Amen*

Beautiful Saviour, You have brought me here
You pulled me from the ashes, You have broken every curse

Blessed Redeemer, You have set this captive free
Lord I can't help but sing

*Faithful, You are…*

I will rest in Your promises My confidence is Your faithfulness

I will rest in Your promises My confidence is Your faithfulness

*Faithful, You are…*

*Katie Torwalt & Bryan Torwalt*

**The Sermon**

Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. They were understandably terrified because they were seeing a man whom they had watched being crucified and buried. Three days later he appeared before them. Of course, they were terrified. Wouldn’t you be?

So, Jesus makes it clear that his resurrection, his coming back from the dead, is not a ghost story. Jesus is not a zombie back from the grave, nor a nightmare of whom they should be afraid. His resurrection is good news.

To make sure they know he’s not a ghost *and* that it’s really him, he shows them his hands and feet. The nail marks were still visible. He also invited them to touch him to reassure themselves because ghosts don’t have flesh and bones. Just to reassure them further he asked for something to eat. And he ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

The resurrection of Jesus is neither ghost story nor fairy-tale, but an event rooted in our history. So, what does Jesus do next?

Well he hadn’t stopped by primarily because he was hungry. No, he’d stopped by for something far more important.

First, Jesus wanted his disciples to know that his crucifixion was not bad luck. Rather, it had been foretold in the scriptures that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. Jesus reminded them that he’d already taught them, well before his crucifixion, that he was going to the cross.

This is really important. Something bad happening to you outside your control is a very different thing from choosing a hard road yourself, in order to achieve some greater purpose. The death and resurrection of Jesus achieves a greater purpose. This is one of the reasons that reading the bible is so important. It helps us to make sense of the things that happen in life.

Having pointed out from the scriptures that his death and resurrection were always God’s Plan A, not the backup or Plan B, Jesus goes on to his second point, to make clear to his disciples what their part is to be in this grand plan of God. They are to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in Jesus’ name to all the nations, and to be witnesses to his resurrection.

If you’ve ever wondered how Christianity spread from 120 people or so in Palestine who were followers of Jesus after his resurrection to a global religion of 2.3 billion it’s simply because of this. The disciples and those who followed them did proclaim repentance and forgiveness in Jesus’ name and were witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection.

Alleluia Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

From 120 people in one country to 2.3 billion in virtually every country in the world, that’s quite a growth arc. It’s taken nearly 2,000 years, mind, but equally Christians still bear witness to Jesus’ resurrection nearly 2,000 years later. That’s fairly astonishing! Will people be talking about the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 2000 years from now in 4020? Probably not.

To be a Christian is more than attending church. It’s more than holding to a set of beliefs, that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. It’s more than reading the bible and prayer. To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus Christ, to seek to live out in our everyday lives something that proclaims repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

In other words, we don’t have to remain as we are. We can be better. If we repent and are forgiven, we can share in Jesus’ death and his resurrection to a new form of life.

And we can bear witness to the resurrection. Not like the first disciples who were able to tell of their encounter with the risen Christ in their living room, eating their fish. That’s not the kind of witness we can bear. But we can bear witness to our own encounters with the risen Christ today.

How do we encounter the risen Christ, you might ask? First, we do so by his Spirit in worship. If you’ve ever felt yourself moved in worship as you hear scriptures read, the bible preached, prayers said, or hymns sung you have encountered something of the risen Christ.

Second, we encounter the risen Christ through his Church. As we encounter the love and forgiveness, compassion and encouragement, challenge and even sometimes the rebuke of our sisters and brothers in Christ we encounter the risen Christ in his Church. It’s one of the reasons that we attend Church; in order to encounter something of the risen Christ in our worship of Christ and in our encounter with each other.

Third, we encounter the risen Christ in his world. The Road to Emmaus in the earlier part of Luke 24 is a story reminding us that we encounter Jesus in the everyday. The apostle Paul also met Jesus on a road, to Damascus. Because the world is created by God it’s therefore a place in which we might encounter something of God, in the smile of a child, the beauty of a rainbow or sunset, in the mighty waters of the sea or river, in birdsong or butterfly, or bee. The psalmist proclaims: the heavens declare the glory of God.

Wherever we encounter the risen Christ we are called to bear witness, with our mouths, of course, but most significantly with our lives. Finding ways to talk about our faith can be challenging. To say you believe in Jesus in 21st century Britain can make you the target of ridicule, can’t it. It’s not going to get you a seat at the cool kids’ table.

Jesus’ third and final instruction is to “stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Those instructions have a hint of lockdown to them, don’t they? Stay here until you have been clothed with power from on high. What does Jesus mean by this?

This is a reminder that if we are to be witnesses to the resurrection, we need power from on high to do so well. That’s why Jesus told them to wait in the city until they were clothed with power from on high. So, they had the resources needed to be his witnesses. So many of us struggle to be Christians because we’ve not asked for power from on high. To be a Christian is a supernatural thing but too many of us want to live as Christians in our own strength. I’m guilty of doing that myself.

In their journey from Easter to Pentecost Jesus taught his disciples to deepen their understanding of the scriptures and then to be his witnesses. But in order to do this well he told them to wait to be clothed with power from on high. That seems like a good formula to me: Deepen our understanding of the scriptures, seek power from on high, be witnesses to the risen Christ. Why would we do anything different? Amen.

**Prayers** –*Let us pray*.

Almighty Father,

we pray for all who struggle against injustice,

and we stand in solidarity with all who are oppressed.

For all who feel hemmed in by despair

or languish in prisons whether physical or mental

we pray that you would draw near

and bring healing and hope.

Incarnate Son

we hold before you parts of your world

where oppressive regimes hold sway;

anywhere people of different faiths

face persecution or prejudice;

or where injustice appears to have had the last word:

we pray that you would draw near

and speak justice and freedom.

Holy Spirit,

you lead us into Truth, empower us to be witnesses

and fill us with your joy and peace.

Break the chains of those who are in bondage.

Throw open the gates to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

May their prisons become anvils

upon which shields of truth are hammered

and their distress the furnace

in which swords for justice are forged.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you know our needs before we ask;

help us to ask only what accords with your will

and attends to your glory. Amen.

We draw all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus gave us

in its modern form. The words will appear on your screen:

**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.**

**Save us from the time of trial**

**and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,**

**now and forever. Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Our final hymn is a song of praise written by Charles Wesley, the great Methodist hymn writer, who died in 1788. O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise.

**Hymn : O for a thousand tongues to sing** (StF 364)

O for a thousand tongues to sing

My great Redeemer’s praise,

The glories of my God and King,

The triumphs of his grace!

*﻿*Jesus — the name that charms our fears,

that bids our sorrows cease;

’tis music in the sinner’s ears,

’tis life, and health, and peace.

﻿See all your sins on Jesus laid:

the Lamb of God was slain;

his soul was once an offering made

that all may heaven gain.

﻿He breaks the power of cancelled sin,

he sets the prisoner free;

his blood can make the foulest clean,

his blood availed for me.

Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb
Your loosened tongues employ
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come
And leap, ye lame, for joy

My gracious Master and my God

assist me to proclaim

To spread through all the earth abroad

The honours of thy name!

*Charles Wesley 1707–1788*

**THE BLESSING**

God who through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ

has given us the victory, give you joy and peace in your faith;

and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

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