

Easter Sunday 2020

This transcript is placed on the web site to assist in the recording and to allow you the words to the Hymns in order to sing along should you wish to do so.

Music:

Welcome and Intimations

Brian Murray (*Locum*)

Hello and welcome once more to Kirkgate's audio service. This is Easter Sunday and perhaps you were hoping to roll the boiled eggs down the hill somewhere with the children. Maybe you managed to get hold of a chocolate Easter Egg or those delicious sugary cream eggs. Well its not to be although you can try rolling the boiled egg down the stairs in the house, that way you wont need to peel them at the bottom!

I hope you are tuning in to these little reflective services on the Kirkgate Web site and also I know many have enjoyed visiting West Kilbride Parish Church's web site for the Sunday morning steamed services.

So we have arrived at Easter Sunday already. Not the Easter Sunday we had planned or anticipated. The band stand on the front at Saltcoats, the Castle Hill and the Beach services are all a plan of the past now. But we have each other and we can still celebrate Jesus being alive where ever we are. In West Kilbride we usually all trekked up Law Hill and had a short service in the wind, and sometimes, rain up there and we would Shout three times back to the village... "**Jesus is alive**", at the top of our voices. Now there's a challenge for you - open the window and shout to the street, to the neighbours - Jesus is alive then pop back in to the isolation we are instructed to keep.

You know this whole period of exile from the church building just helps to reinforce what we always say. **The church is the people not the building.**

Today we are celebrating the discovery of the empty tomb once more. Mary setting out in the dark and finding only emptiness where there should have been death, for life had come to humanity. We shall look at that story again and keep it sacred as we hear the word of God from John 20 the disciple whom Jesus loved. John tells the story very much from His point of view and He plays a major role for in order to convince us of who Jesus was He himself saw the empty tomb and believed.

In order to take the Easter story in once more I would encourage you to have a quiet time with this recording. To get comfy, a beverage to hand even ear phones to cut out unwelcome sounds and interruptions and then we can meditate on the meaning of the word of God today together and take in the victorious resurrection story upon which our whole Christian faith stands.

Let us still our hearts for a moment before we worship.

Let us here the call to worship

Call to worship: Psalm 118

15 Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! 16 The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!" 17 I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

Our opening Hymn today speaks a truth about the resurrection so please sing along to the recording placed here by our Stuart.

Hymn: Jesus Christ is Risen Today.

1 Jesus Christ is ris'n today, Alleluia!

our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
who did once upon the cross Alleluia!
suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!

2 Hymns of praise then let us sing Alleluia!
unto Christ our heav'nly King, Alleluia!
who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
sinners to redeem and save. Alleluia!

3 But the anguish he endured, Alleluia!
our salvation has procured; Alleluia!
now in Heaven Christ is King, Alleluia!
where the angels ever sing. Alleluia!

4 Sing we to our God above Alleluia!
praise eternal as his love; Alleluia!
praise him, all ye heav'nly host, Alleluia!
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia!

Prayer of Approach, Thanksgiving and Confession and the Lord's Prayer.

God of love,
Creator of the universe,
in You alone we find our fulfilment and completion.
Mystery manifested in many ways, through Your word of
life our Bibles, meditation, music and prayer, as we search
inwardly,
seeking the intuition of the soul,
for the assurance, shalom and wholeness
only You can give.
Surrounded by the saints
of today and earlier generations,
our very streets and walls echo and resound with praise;
prayers and songs offered in worship
by children, women and men throughout the ages all
extolling the wonders of Jesus Your only begotten Son.
We celebrate the continuing miracle of the resurrection, of
Christ rising within us.

Forgiving Father,

You hear the cries of the soul.

Assure us that there is no length to which You will not go, no emptiness, darkness or depth which You will not enter, to find, comfort, embrace and raise us up.

We lay before You our brokenness:

burdens of the heart and fragile memories.

May we take to heart the words of Jesus: **‘Your sins are forgiven’**.

Almighty God have mercy upon us,

grant us your pardon and remission of all our sins, and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Increase our awareness of Your Presence, O God;

with the eyes of faith, may we see the beauty of Your cosmos, the world blessed by Your Holy Spirit, and our lives a daily sacrifice,

moulded and shaped by the contours of compassion:

respect for others, justice for the earth, and love of self.

Like Mary, may we rise early and journey to the tomb;

like the Beloved Disciple, may we pause,

prepare ourselves,

and, in the darkness, stillness and emptiness,

see and believe.

May Transcendence touch and transfigure

the tombs of our lives. In Jesus name

Amen.

Scripture Reading : John 20:verses 1-18

The Empty Tomb

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.
4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"
"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Let us sing along once more the Hymn

Hymn: Christ Triumphant Ever Reigning

Christ triumphant, ever reigning
Saviour, Master, King
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining
Hear us as we sing

Chorus

Yours the glory and the crown,
The high renown, the eternal name

Word incarnate, truth revealing
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
By your humble birth
Chorus

Suffering Servant, scorned, ill-treated
Victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated
Sinners justified
Chorus

Priestly King, enthroned forever
High in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
Stifle hymns of love
Chorus

So, our hearts and voices raising
Through the ages long
Ceaselessly upon You gazing

This shall be our song

Chorus

Yours the glory and the crown,
The high renown, the eternal name

Sermon: The empty or full life in Christ

The story of the empty tomb is one of the most joyful and victorious accounts of the mysteries of God. The plan He had to redeem humanity as it was to nearing fruition. A truly remarkable event upon which our Christian faith is built.

New life from death.

Without the resurrection there is no Christianity for there is no concept of everlasting life having conquered death.

Well, Easter presents us once more with an emotional roller coaster through the whole week. Maybe more so this year than any other time in living memory. As we isolate ourselves and hopefully have more time to reflect and read out Bibles - the depth of meaning of Easter might reverberate louder in our hearts and minds for all that.

Not least we remember the awful method of torture that Jesus bore to death on the cross, the blood letting at the hands of the soldiers, and unfathomable cruelty that humans can inflict on others.

Then there is the discovery of the empty tomb that we heard in our reading today and the awful anxiety and mourning of Mary Magdalene and the others. But of course then comes the elation, the lifting of the weight of deathly thoughts and the darkness that fell on all Jesus followers at His arrest and death. From that darkness into light once more.

Similarly for us when there is some burden or awful worry we may have about something about to over take us,

be that illness,
loss of a job,
a trouble we know we are in and must face in the coming
daylight,
WE pray for strength and peace and we might see our
problem lifted by some divine intervention, that removes
the difficulty. The desperate looming meeting isn't needed
- something had changed,
the illness we had has been removed and we have good
news from the consultant,
the situation that worried us is somehow never as bad as
we thought.

Well ramp that up a thousand times and we might get
close to feeling what Mary felt as she arrived at the tomb
of Jesus. Utter devastation and despair on top of the
horrific death of Jesus in the first place - now the body had
gone.

Thoughts

What of Jesus Spirit?

Was that too lost for ever?

You see, superstitiously, it was thought that the deceased
Spirit hung around the grave for three days or so after
burial.

But where had they taken Him?

And then the lifting of an awful burden by the intervention
of the angels sitting in the empty tomb, I expect waiting on
the mortals to turn up.

Why not Jesus sitting there waiting?

Where was He?

Well, He couldn't have been far away as He came and
stood beside Mary at length.

Even the disciples had not seen Jesus at first light - it was
not until later He chose to go to them. Why tell the women
firstly, was it again a test of faith?

'Gentlemen you have never taken the word of a woman in testimony before for you believe them to be too highly strung',

but here Jesus even turns that on its head. Go tell them He asks of Mary. Well they don't believe her and must run to the tomb themselves as a pair, Peter and John, for the word of one could be contradicted, but of two witnesses then there was truth in the telling.

So now the realisation that Jesus had achieved what He came to do.

Now they would understand what He had been telling them all along that He would be handed over to the authorities, tried falsely and be put to death only to rise again on the third day.

Over the next few days weeks and months the blinkers were removed and Mary and the others would come to know that what Jesus said wasn't some Spiritual existence somewhere beyond their ken, but He was with them in body mind and spirit once more - standing before them in the resurrected body, hungry for some broiled fish.

The joy then that Jesus had done what He came to do brought tears and laughter all at the same time. Joy that Heaven was now a place of reality through the Son.

Joy that He had been victorious over death and that they, and we who follow Christ, have a pathway to everlasting life in the Kingdom.

A realisation that nothing could ever separate us again from the love of God when we grasp hold of that salvation graciously won for us on the cross whether we think we deserve it or not.

Then there is that amazing closeness we can have with the creator and maker of all things. What a privilege, what a crazy thought, what a remarkable and mysterious thing.

Write books on it will we?
Fill volumes of commentaries?
Preach for all we are worth?

But they all are like a pebble on the sea shore compared to the simple faith and belief of a true believer that God has imprinted into ones heart and imprinted the truth on the mind.

Therein lies an intuitive love, servitude, unselfish sacrificial giving to others and love for God through the Son Jesus. Love for our neighbours and all this won by the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness first shown to us by God through the cross and forgiveness we must show to others as we live in the blessing of God the Father.

The story of the resurrection - the empty tomb- the victory of Lord Jesus Christ speaks for itself. It is simply an amazing life changing word for those who have open hearts and fertile minds to receive it.

In John's Gospel He begins the account by telling us of the women coming in darkness and looking into the empty tomb. Had He, John, felt in His heart all along a belief that the empty tomb confirmed for Him what He dared to believe? Jesus is the Son of God?

Perhaps such conjecture on our part makes it easier to understand the verse where John eventually followed Peter into the dark tomb saw and believed. It was confirmed for Him that Jesus truly was the Son of God, the resurrection life that He spoke of to them before many times before then.

Yet we are told they still had more to come to truly convince them and we shall come to that in the coming weeks as Jesus appears to His disciples once more in various places.

Peter on the other hand had to barge in and feel the linen cloths to try and understand, but the whole scene still did not resonate within Peter's understanding for we are told he just went away amazed.

Even those who do not come to faith in Jesus can be amazed at the story. Even those who watched Lazarus appear from the tomb could be amazed, but still not believe. John said he simply looked at the emptiness of the tomb and the folded grave clothes and believed.

The empty tomb represents, in a metaphorical way, the emptiness felt of Spirit within when we cannot find Jesus. When we shut Him out or cannot bring ourselves to believe He is alive in the world today. The empty tomb is where most people in despair might stay rather than emerge to the light.

Mary still not understanding thought that someone had removed the body manually and she begged the figure standing beside her, masked in her own tears,

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” verse 15

Jesus who tenderly called her name, Mary, stood so close.

The choice - keep looking into an empty tomb of despair or look up at Jesus face even through tears of pain and anguish and there find joy and peace.

For in times of despair we might hide in the empty tomb - we have missed the resurrection and stare into that darkness too long.

Choosing to stay in the confinement of the darkness all around us that hides our despair or sin like a cloak, for to emerge from that place of death the light of the resurrected Lord shines brightly - maybe too brightly for our eyes at times.

We may feel the pain and shame of our exposed sin. It can be all too distressing when we feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit upon us who starkly reveals our weaknesses and yet secures our faith and bolsters our strengths to resist temptations.

When we grasp, again, the joy of the Christian faith, wholly, with no preconditions, we see how Jesus blood was poured out for us while we still remained sinners. God who knows us intimately who loved us then still loves us now, still cares for us, still wants us to come to Him by believing on Jesus and His gracious plan for the redemption for humanity.

Is there an emptiness in our lives that today's crisis is bringing to the fore? In this time of fear and worry many are questioning what life is all about right now. Suddenly some might be realising or having it confirmed that blood is thicker than water so to speak. That relationships among us all and the relationship with God the creator are more important than any world goods.

It is awful to think that the Corona Virus rages through the world, but it is also bringing out the milk of human kindness in ways that no amount of preaching will ever do. It shows that we all need each other, we are all inextricably linked as humans, animals and plant life. We

all need each other. God made us to live together in community and to live in harmony at that.

This is a joyful day for the Christians, despite times of darkness we see around us, for Jesus is alive and because of that we too can have life to the full now and life everlasting.

Such a thought might just allow us to defeat the fear and darkness we might pull around us thinking it is a comfort blanket when in fact we can throw that off and walk in the light of love and forgiveness and fear not, as we promote, and live in peace. The peace of our Lord Jesus that goes beyond anything we have ever known. I pray this day of celebration finds you all safe and well and with a great measure of peace and comfort in the knowledge we have a glorious amazing remarkable and believable friend and saviour Jesus Christ who can change our lives right now and who can fit us right for everlasting life in Heaven to come.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession and thanksgiving.

Holy God,
in ways diverse and rich we feel ourselves to be truly blessed.

Creation's beauty is a sacrament:
through the sky's shifting clouds, the majesty of mountains, the rhythmic sound of waves flowing and ebbing at the shore front,
we see the unseeable God;
in the bright moon and vermillion sunset,
in the song of the blackbird while it is still dark, and nature's bud and flower,
we thank You for the blessing of fruitful beauty, of creation's rising in our Springtime once more.

We celebrate and pray for the witness of Your church throughout the world, in all its colour, diversity and difference. May the Body of the Risen Christ reflect the self-forgetfulness of Jesus; may it be a place of contemplation and compassion. God of the soul, in the stillness of this time in our private places, we bring to You the suffering of the world. Present in every aching heart, Jesus is love and peace.

We are mindful of those broken by life events: by hardships, injury, unkindness or abuse. We pray for all who work in caring professions: for the services which seek to sooth and heal the sicknesses of body, mind or spirit. Present in every darkness, may the Risen Christ burn brightly bringing light, renewal and new life. Especially we remember those who are suffering from Corona Virus and all who care for them. Bless them with healing Lord and for those who have lost life's battle comfort the loved ones who are lost and in shock at these, trying times. Eternal God, dwelling deep within us, bless our country, the Queen, all political leaders at Westminster and Holyrood; guide all who shape our common life. We pray for healing for the Prime Minister that he will be back in his place leading and organising for all our benefit at this time of national and international crises. May we play our part in helping to build

a future, a society, in which the stranger is welcomed, the vulnerable are valued and protected, human rights are honoured, and creation itself nurtured. May we commit ourselves to overcome violence against neighbour, cruelty to animals and careless destruction of the planet.

Christ of the cosmos,
rise again in us.

In reflective silence,
we call to mind those whom we love,
we remember their smiles, the joy they have brought us
now in our time of quiet prayer.

Gracious God,
We give thanks for all who seek renewal, rebirth and the miracle of inner resurrection.
God of Eternity,
surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses, we pray for our loved ones departed, mindful that Your Church is one, for this life and always.

These prayers we offer in Jesus' Name, and in His words of the Lord's Prayer we would sum up all our prayers, saying together.....

Our Father

which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.

Amen

WE could not conclude our Easter Sunday without singing that timeless song of victory that Christ has won for us. So if you can then sing with gusto so that the neighbours can hear and marvel.

Hymn : Thine be the Glory

1 Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son:
endless is the vict'ry thou o'er death hast won;
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay.

Refrain:

Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry thou o'er death hast won.

2 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.

[Refrain]

3 No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;
life is naught without thee: aid us in our strife;
make us more than conqu'rors, thro' thy deathless love:
bring us safe thro' Jordan to thy home above.

[Refrain]

Benediction

Even in these times of struggle let us go with joy in our hearts and victory cries on our lips proclaiming our Lord and Saviour Jesus and as we embrace the resurrection life He offers then let us continue in the strength of Almighty God and the blessing of Father Son and Holy Spirit remain with us now and forevermore.

Amen

Music