

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 14th April 2024
The Third Sunday
of Easter
Peter Ranscombe

Prayer of Approach

God of the analogue and God of the digital,
thank you for bringing us together to worship you today,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south,
both in-person and online.

Please bless and protect all those Christians throughout the world
who are persecuted for their faith
and who even risk their lives to gather to worship you.

God of the noise and God of the quiet,
please empty any distractions from our hearts
and from our minds today,
so that we can focus on you and on your Word.

Please help us to put aside our shopping lists,
our to-do lists, and our buckets lists,
so that we can spend this time with you.

Please help us to forget our aches and our pains,
our fears and our doubts,
even just for this short hour,
so we can worship you and recharge our spiritual batteries.

God of joy and God of energy,
Please peel back the layers of our egos
and expose that part of your Holy Spirit that dwells inside us.
Please fill us with the energy we need to worship you –
to sing our hymns, to tap our toes, to dance around
if your Spirit moves us in that way.
Please help us to fill the buildings in which we find ourselves today
with our praise as we worship you.
We ask this, and all these things, and praise you, and thank you,
in the name of your son, and our risen saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Call to Worship

Our Call to Worship today comes from Psalm 4, reading verses 6 and 7:

“There are many who say,
‘O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!’
You have put gladness in my heart,
more than when their grain and wine abound.”

So let us, today, feel the light of God’s face shine on us as we worship.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of creation,
during this season of Easter,
we give you thanks for all your gifts that put gladness into our hearts:
for lambs leaping in the fields, for birds singing in the trees,
for the excitement and the anticipation of the summer that lies ahead.

God of mercy,
please forgive us for those moments
when we’ve not cared for your awe-inspiring creation.

Please forgive us for those moments
when we become obsessed with grain and wine,
with demanding more and more,
with ignoring your instructions to care for your planet
and to care for each other.

Please forgive us for speaking when we should have stayed silent –
and please forgive us for staying silent when we should have shouted
at the top of our lungs to bring about your peace and your justice.

Please forgive us for acting when we should have stayed still –
and please forgive us for staying still
when we should have raced into action to demonstrate your love
for the world and your love for our neighbours.

And, in this moment of silence,
please forgive us for the sins that are weighing heavily on our hearts today...

[silence]

God of forgiveness,

thank you for washing away our sins
through Jesus's death on the cross.
Thank you for raising Jesus from the dead,
and in doing so raising us to new life with you.
As your forgiven people,
please hear us now as we say the words of the Lord's Prayer,
which Jesus taught to his friends... Our Father...

Prayer of Illumination

God of the story, please open our hearts and our minds
to hear or to read your words and your Word. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Children's address – 'What happens next?'

You'll need three objects – one red, one amber/orange, and one green. You could use pieces of paper, or you could use coloured cushions or other coloured objects.

You'll need three volunteers, one to hold up each coloured object. If you only have one volunteer then they'll need to hold up each coloured object in turn.

You'll then need someone from the congregation to shout out the sequence of traffic lights – from red through to green and then back again.

The three volunteers then need to hold up their coloured objects at the right moment:
Red – "Stop." Red and amber – "Get ready to go." Green – "Go." Amber – "Get ready to stop." Red – "Stop".

As they do so, you can explain that, in order to get the sequence correct, you need to know "what happens next." After Easter, the first disciples were also waiting to find out what would happen next after Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, as we'll find out in today's Bible reading...

[You could replace the coloured objects and the traffic lights with other sequences – the important point is to get people thinking about "What happens next"]

Reading

St Luke 24: 36b-48

Sermon Notes

Introduction – “What happens next?”

Think about some of your favourite series of books, radio programmes, television programmes, or films – how do they keep you coming back for more? Often, writers will use a “cliffhanger” at the end of one episode, book, or film to make the audience (whether they’re a viewer, listener, or reader) tune in again next time to find out “what happens next.” You could share your favourite cliffhangers with your congregation – or, if your congregants or worshippers are confident enough to chat during worship, you can all share your favourite cliff hangers with each other. Examples could include episodes of *The Archers*, *Eastenders*, or *River City*, or series of films, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, or the two-part endings to *Harry Potter* or *The Hunger Games*.

Luke 24: 36b-48

During the weeks following Easter, we often find ourselves asking, “What happens next?” – there’s a bit of a lull once we’ve read the Easter story and we await Pentecost. The writer of Luke’s Gospel – whether intentionally or simply through the editing process – leads us through a series of cliff hangers following the resurrection; after the scene in the garden, after the road to Emmaus, and again and again and again until we reach Ascension (and then Pentecost). You may find it worthwhile to reflect on the fact that, while we know “what happens next” the first disciples obviously didn’t, leading to the doubt that’s illustrated in the verses from Luke.

Applying the message

Are any worshippers or congregants facing a “What happens next?” moment in their lives? There’s no need to single anyone out, but you could talk in general terms about the moments in our lives when we’re left asking “What happens next?” – after a relationship ends, after a spouse dies, after losing a job. Where do we find comfort and support in those moments? Hopefully through the love and support of our fellow Christians, and through prayer and Bible study. If people are feeling distant from God then there’s an opportunity here to invite them to pray, either in private by themselves when they get home, or with a minister or elder. As congregations, sometimes we also face “What happens next?” moments – when a minister leaves and we enter vacancy, when we leave behind a Victorian building to start meeting in a community centre, when we feel the Holy Spirit calling us to “plant” a church on a new housing estate. If your congregation is facing a “What happens next?” moment then take comfort in Jesus’s words to his disciples in the passage from Luke, and listen for guidance from the Holy Spirit about the next steps God wants you to follow.

Offertory Prayer

God of the story,
you've given us your story to tell – through Jesus' life here on Earth,
through the whispers and the shouts of your Holy Spirit,
and through the ways in which your story has changed our story.
Thank you for the gift of your story.
Your love for us knows no bounds –
you created this planet and each one of us,
and you love us more than we will ever know.
Anything we offer back to you – no matter how big or how small –
will pale in comparison to your love for us.
Yet please use these gifts of our money –
and please use the gifts of our time and our talents –
in your service, so that we can share your story.
We ask this, and all these things, and praise you, and thank you,
in the name of your son, and our risen saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God of peace, we bring before you now
those places in the world that need to hear your story.
All those places that need to hear your story of love
to silence the screams of war.
All those places that need to hear your story of love
to silence the cries of discord.
All those places that need to hear your story of love
to free people from the chains of empire in all its forms.
Please bring peace to your world, Merciful God.

God of guidance,
please guide all those people
who we place in positions of responsibility.
Please bless and guide:
 our monarch;
 our prime minister, first ministers, and chief ministers,
 and all our representatives in our parliaments and assemblies and councils.
Please place your gospel story on their hearts,
so that they feed the hungry, health the sick, clothe the naked,
and share your love with our neighbours,
whether they live next door or on the other side of the world.

God of healing,
We bring before you now all those people whose stories involve pain.
Please heal those who are sick, whether in body or in mind.

Please strengthen those for whom treatment is coming to an end.
Please comfort those who grieve for the loss of a loved one.
And, in a moment of silence, we pray for all those people whose names you've placed
on our hearts today...

[silence]

Please help them all to hear your story of everlasting love and hope, demonstrated for
us and for all eternity through Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection at Easter.

God of witness,
thank you for all those people who help us to tell our story –
thank you for our Ministers and our Church Related Community Workers,
our elders and our lay preachers, our office bearers and our volunteers.
Thank you for the faith and the witness of your United Reformed Church
and our ecumenical partners across these three nations
and these three crown dependencies.

Please bless all those who serve you and your congregations.
Thank you for the faith and the witness of those who have sat in these pews
and in these seats and in these homes before us –
the relatives and the friends, the companions and the guides,
who through their lives have shared your story with us.

Please help us to follow their example
and share our story and your story
with our relatives and our friends,
our neighbours and even our enemies.

Please lead us to that wonderful moment
when all your people will sing about the same story,
about your overwhelming love and grace,
in this time and throughout all time, world without end. Amen.

Blessing

Our worship has ended – now our service begins.

And so may we go from this place:
ready to sing our song, ready to tell our story, and ready to share our version of events
and may the grace of our Risen Saviour, Jesus Christ,
the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us, and all those we love, and all those we ought to love,
this day, and forevermore. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
The day of resurrection!	246	413	311	
Tell me the old, old story				628
You are called to tell the story		680		
I will sing the wondrous story			323(ii)	315
O for a thousand tongues to sing	285	352	364(ii)	496
We have a gospel to proclaim		363	418	728
From heaven you came, helpless babe		374	272	162
God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year	573	235		189
Lord, Thy Church on Earth is Seeking	579		410	
The Church is wherever God's people are praising	583	522		

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Another Idea

If you'd like to include some "music for reflection" after the sermon – and if you have the necessary licences – then you could play "Read all about it (part three)" by Scottish singer Emeli Sande: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q03E7oTc5qo> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsvIzK1VLdo>

Sande performed her song at the closing ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games in London, having sung the hymn "Abide with me" at the games' opening ceremony.