

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2024  
The Second Sunday  
of Easter  
The Revd  
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## Note

In these joyful days of Eastertide we think of those early stories of disciples learning to form new communities; a scared community transformed by Jesus' presence, a united community learning to share what they had to make a difference, a new community embodying ancient poetry about the fragrance of harmony. We gather today, in churches and around screens as a dispersed but loving community. United in our love of the Risen Lord and our desire to serve him all our days long. We think today about the different communities that are described in our readings: the exciting, unified and energetic early Church and the traumatised disciples who lock themselves away for fear of the authorities. We think too of the short Psalm 133 which extols unity as a sign of God's blessing.

## Call To Worship

Christ is risen, alleluia! **Christ is risen indeed, alleluia!**

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!  
Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour!  
Christ has conquered! Jesus Christ our King is risen!  
Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!

**Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!**

Rejoice, O Mother Church! The risen Saviour shines upon you!  
Let this place resound with joy, echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

## Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Forgiveness

We bring you our prayers and praises, O Most High, in these days of joy;  
nature springs to life, plants start to flower, animals enjoy warmer and longer days,  
and we remember your saving actions, bringing life from death, light from gloom.

We praise you, Risen Lord Jesus, for your love which overcame death,  
for your life which shows us how to live, for your touch which calls us back to life  
when all seems wintry, desolate, and painful.

In these days of joy, Most Holy Spirit, remind us always to turn around and follow where you call;  
may your love remind us to build up and not tear down community,  
to strengthen not weaken discipleship,  
to serve and not to seek to be served.

For the times, O God, when we've turned away from you,  
we repent, and ask for time to change;  
for the times, O God, when we've denied the power of your love,  
we repent and ask for time to change;  
for the times, O God, when we've despaired,  
we repent and ask for time to change.

*pause*

God, the Source of all mercy  
and has reconciled the world to Himself,  
through the life, love, death, and new life of Jesus Christ.  
God, the Holy Spirit has come amongst us for the forgiveness of sins.  
Through the ministry of the community of the Church,  
we receive pardon and peace,  
and become a place where forgiveness is key to our life together.  
Accept, then the forgiveness you are offered, forgive others,  
and find the courage to forgive yourself. Amen.

## Prayer for Illumination

Let us be, O Spirit, of one heart and mind,  
that as we hear the Word read and proclaimed,  
we may be words which tell of the Word,  
Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

## Readings

*Acts 4:32-35 | St John 20:19-31*

## All Age Activity

Get some lengths of wool or yarn – about 30cm long – in three different colours and knot sets of one of each colour together in bundles of three. Give everyone a set to plait or twist into a friendship bracelet representing God, the Three in One – and our mission outlined in Micah to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Emphasis we do these things together, as a community which gives up fear and engages in God's mission.

Don't forget the prayer prompts on the website:

<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/children-youth-work/prayer-prompts-for-children/>

## Sermon Notes

Our readings address trauma and joy; unity and giving, grace and mystery - and that odd Psalm about Aaron's beard! All our readings are about community and have much they can offer us.

### *St John*

Our Gospel reading has the disciples gathered in fear and despondency. They'd lost their Lord to political manoeuvres, unjust trial, dreadful torture, and excruciating death. Now gathered fearfully together what did they feel? Despair? Denial? Without much ado Jesus appears, bidding them peace; peace was the last reaction we'd expect! Excitement, joy, denial, tears, confession maybe but probably not peace! Jesus has to tell them "peace" twice to calm them. After a bit of peace descended Jesus commissioned them to forgive by breathing the Holy Spirit upon them. Then we're taken to poor Thomas who hadn't been present for this peaceful commissioning. A bit more trauma for Thomas feeling excluded and so another appearance is given.

We can relate to this shattered community. We trauma and fear. Over Covid so much was lost in our society and in our churches; the tender bonds that hold us were strained with not being able to meet; those who managed to provide worship did so much to help a community navigate national traumas – the anger felt at parties in Downing Street is a sign of the depth of the trauma we experienced. We have, however, other traumas too. In our lifetimes we've seen the decline of the Church from being a significant institution in our society to something marginal and ignored. We realise that social trends have engulfed us, and whilst society wonders about spirituality we've squandered a lot of our time debating things that society has already made its mind up about. There's a trauma here in seeing a church we love decline and a puzzle at why people are less interested in religion than they used to be. We need Jesus giving us peace just as those first disciples did.

### *Acts*

It relays what's happened to the community of the Church after Pentecost. We don't know how much time has passed since the events in John's Gospel but here is a community which is no longer afraid, that knows what it's about, a community of "one heart and soul" where goods and lives were shared. Here is a community where people could testify to the power of Jesus' resurrection, where the weaker members in need were helped, where the peace of Christ has both taken root and energised them in unity, proclamation, and compassion. Here is a community which is growing. Here is a

community which lives out the words of the short Psalm 133 which sees how good and pleasant it is for kindred to live together in unity.

Can we relate to this vision of community? Can we see the joy that comes from unity? Of course, unity is part of our DNA in the URC with differing traditions coming together and with our commitment now to ecumenical relationships. We know how good it feels when a congregation agree on and deliver a project – helping at the foodbank, providing an after-school club, welcoming asylum seekers (and getting castigated in the press for it!) When projects work well they can unleash energy and even draw people into the life of the Church. We may not have images of oil on beards as a sign of joy, but we can certainly appreciate the gift of unity – especially after a period of discord.

Do our local congregations tend more to the first community we thought about – the fearful traumatised disciples or the second, the mission centred confident early Church? Of course, these were not essentially different communities; the first leads to the second. That mysterious encounter with the Risen Lord led the traumatised, bickering, guilt ridden disciples into the unified, confident, community of proclamation that changed the world.

We have choices arising from our mysterious encounters with the Risen Jesus.

- be dominated by the traumas of our age or to proclaim the peaceful new life in Christ
- bicker, give into guilt and recrimination or to be united in our purpose.
- hoard what we have for the rainy day that never comes or share with those in need.
- tear down our communities with arguments about trivia or build them up with a focus on the needs around us.
- stay fearful in the face of decline, or become confident in our unity and belief that God hasn't finished with us yet.
- have a false unity where we're only focused on the needs of our members, or use that God-given unity to serve those outside of the Church.

This Eastertide let's decide to change; to turn away from the understandable fears and traumas that beset our congregations, and our common life together in society, and, instead, choose to serve. This Eastertide let's welcome the peace that Jesus brings to us in our fears and insecurities and reach out to heal the wounded. This Eastertide let's set aside our petty divisions and unite in a common purpose to proclaim the good news of the Risen Jesus who heals, brings peace, and reminds us that we are blessed to be a blessing to others.

## Affirmation of Faith

We declare what was known from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own hearts: **Jesus is risen!**

We declare that abundant life is revealed, and we have seen it, experienced it, and lived it for: **Jesus is risen!**

We declare that we have fellowship with God, the Source of all life, the risen Lord, and the Holy Spirit who calls us to unity for: **Jesus is risen!**

We declare that in this fellowship with God there is no obscurity, and we are called to live in the light for: **Jesus is risen!**

We declare that, when we wander back into the gloom, the One who loved, lived and died for us and for the world, forgives and calls us home for: **Jesus is risen! Amen!**

(based on 1 John 1: 1-2:2)

## Intercessions

O Holy Trinity, the dance of Your love  
gives a pattern for our lives and communities.  
In the love that flows within You and out to all creation,  
we find our dignity, explore our unity, and proclaim abundant life.  
Listen to us now as we bring our prayers for our world to You.

We pray for communities devastated by war, division, and conflict,  
where bombs are heard more than laughter,  
where evil preys on women and children,  
where men find hope in hatred,  
and where blood, not oil, flows from beards.

*pause*

We pray for communities living with trauma,  
where the pandemic still bites,  
where religious and ethnic diversity is used as a weapon,  
where fear divides and conquers,  
where poverty kills and where lies attack truth.

*pause*

We pray for peace, the peace that the Risen Lord brings,  
the peace which disturbs as much as it comforts,  
the peace which makes us look out from our own pain,  
to the mission fields before us.

*pause*

In the silence of our hearts we bring to You, O Trinity of love,  
those we love and worry about and who are in any kind of need...

*longer pause*

We join our prayers together, O God, as we pray as Jesus taught saying

Our Father...

## Offertory

Many things are needed to build communities and to allow them to flourish – open hearts, time, love, forbearance, honesty, and an attitude of generous giving. We give of our time, talents, and treasure to build communities and, sometimes, we must give without counting the cost. The charities and causes we wish to support suffer from the cost of living crisis as do our congregations. Jesus' peace allows us to relax and not worry but doesn't absolve us of the need to give. So now, in this service we give thanks for all that is given to build up our churches.

Eternal God,  
before the ages You yearned with love and brought creation into being.  
You gave of Yourself, eventually giving Yourself to die for us.  
You give us Your peace a disturbing peace which drives us to mission.  
Bless now these gifts, small tokens of our gratitude,  
that all we give will build your Realm. Amen.

## Holy Communion

God is here!  
Lift up your hearts  
Let us give God our thanks and praise!

**God's Spirit is with us!  
we lift them up to God!  
It is our duty and our joy to worship God!**

Living God, out of chaos and darkness  
your creative word called light into being and life in all its fulness.  
Though in the garden we chose to disobey you  
and death entered our world  
you are the bringer of life from the places of death.  
You saved Noah and his family from the Flood  
and passed over the children of Israel  
when death struck the firstborn of Egypt.  
You led your people out from slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon.  
You saved Jonah from the belly of the whale  
and Daniel from the lions' den.  
By your power Sarah and Hannah brought forth sons  
and Ruth the stranger became the mother of kings.

**Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!  
Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour!  
Christ has conquered! Jesus Christ our King is risen!  
Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!  
Rejoice, O Mother Church!**

**The risen Saviour shines upon you!  
Let this place resound with joy,  
echoing the mighty song of all God's people!**

Therefore, with all your people in heaven and on earth  
we sing the triumphant hymn of your glory:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

Born on a dark night, during his life on earth  
the light of your Son's presence brought hope to the lost and healing to the sick.  
He preached good news to the poor and ate with sinners.  
For this he was pursued to the death.  
For this, the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed  
took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said:

'This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying:  
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.  
For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,  
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

We praise you that the darkness could not hold him  
for he was raised at dawn to bring new life to the world.  
By his power sin is purged, innocence restored to the fallen, joy to the mourners;  
hatred is vanquished, tyranny laid low;  
harmony reigns, heaven and earth are united and humanity is reconciled with God.

The Morning Star has risen, never again to set.  
His light is become our light; his Spirit is ours;  
may our lives shine with the radiance of his glory  
and this bread and wine lead us to the feasting of the Kingdom,  
where we shall be raised up to see him face to face,  
in the glory of the blessed Trinity, through all ages. **Amen.**

## Post Communion Prayer

God of all hope,  
we bless and thank You for nourishing us with Christ, the bread of life.  
Help us to live free from all desires for anything else that promises to satisfy.  
Strengthen us now to offer this bread to all who hunger.  
Through Jesus Christ, the Living Bread, we pray, Amen.

## Blessing

May the One who calls us to unity,  
the One who brings us disturbing peace,  
the One who drives us serve  
enable you to build community, heal wounds,  
and show love in action,  
and the blessing of Almighty God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
be with you, and all whom you love  
now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Alleluia, Alleluia Give Thanks to the Risen Lord	234		295	30
Christ the Lord is risen again	233			
Come Ye Faithful Raise the Strain	236	414		
Now the Green Blade Riseth	243	417	306	
God Came In Jesus	237			
Christ Has Risen While Earth Slumbers		430	296	
The Day of Resurrection ( <i>suggest Ellacombe as the tune</i> )	246	413	311	
Eat This Bread and Never Hunger		661	582	
Alleluia Alleluia Hearts to Heaven & Voices Raise		427		

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

[Songs from Further Afield...](#)



Ralph Wright's *Sing of One Who Walks Beside Us* goes to the lovely American folk tune Holy Manna. You can hear it sung here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFPX6GzzYc0> The words are on the video too.

Pablo D Sosa's version of Psalm 133 (with words) can be heard here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBEWNINLCrU>

Stephen Dean's *Holy Gifts for Holy People* can be heard here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8G2kZGA6f0Q>. The words can be found here <https://dh8zy5a1i9xe5.cloudfront.net/shared/pdf/preview/23009z1.pdf>