Please note that is you wish to share in the Communion service, you will need to provide some bread and wine.

**Easter Day April 4th 2021**

Good morning and welcome to our Easter celebration.

We join together to rejoice. We join together to give thanks. We join together to worship God, the giver of life. For today we remember that day which transformed the course of history and which, across the years, has transformed the lives of countless people across the world.

The Lord is risen! **He is risen indeed.**

We sing together

**1072 In Christ alone my hope is found**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song;  this cornerstone, this solid ground,  firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  What heights of love, what depths of peace,  when fears are stilled, when strivings cease! My comforter, my all in all,  here in the love of Christ I stand. | 2.. In Christ alone - who took on flesh,  fullness of God in helpless Babe!  This gift of love and righteousness,  scorned by the ones he came to save till on that cross as Jesus died,  the wrath of God was satisfied,  for every sin on Him was laid;  here in the death of Christ I live. |
| 3.. There in the ground his body lay,  light of the world by darkness slain,  then, bursting forth in glorious day,  up from the grave He rose again!  And as he stands in victory sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  for I am His and He is mine -  bought with the precious blood of Christ. | 4.. No guilt in life, no fear in death,  this is the power of Christ in me;  from life's first cry to final breath,  Jesus commands my destiny.  No power of hell, no scheme of man  can ever pluck me from His hand;  till he returns or calls me home,  here in the power of Christ I'll stand! |
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**Prayers**

Living God, we are here in the name of Jesus. We are here to celebrate once more his resurrection from the dead, to rejoice once more at his victory over evil, hatred and death, to give thanks once more for his living presence with us now and always.

Revive our praise, our worship, ourselves as we come before you. Fill us with joy and wonder as we hear again the message of the risen Christ and as we recognise his presence among us through his Holy Spirit.

Living God, we are here to confess our faults and failings, to acknowledge our unworthiness of your love and the many blessings that we receive day by day. We come to seek your forgiveness and to ask for renewal in our lives.

Hear us as we make our own confessions now.

Lord receive our confessions. Cleanse and restore us through the love of Christ and strengthen us by the power of your Holy Spirit to become the people you want us to be so that we may serve you better and live to your glory.

Lord of life

**Hear us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

**Children’s Talk**

I have done a series of pictures with a statement about each one. I will ask the children to say whether they are true or false. The last ones are :- Jesus was crucified on Good Friday. The stone was rolled away. The tomb was empty. The disciples stole the body. Mary Magdalen was the first to see Jesus alive again. Through these slides I will remind the children of the Easter story.

**Reading John 20: 1-18 (NIV)**

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.

**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 realize 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.

**Address**

When I sat down at my computer to start to write what I felt I could share with you on this most important day in the Christian Calendar, I had just returned from Specsavers. Anyone who has seen me recently might have noticed that I have resorted to wearing the glasses that I have worn for a couple of years. I have just returned to the shop the new ones I got a couple of weeks ago because I wasn’t happy with them. The reason was, that for the first time, I had decided to try the kind of lenses that darken in the sunlight. What I hadn’t realised was that the moment I stepped outside, they would immediately turn dark whether it was sunny or not. In practice it meant that I never saw any natural colours when I was outside the home. I was in constant darkness.

In the grand scheme of things you might say that it wasn’t really important but it got me thinking about people living in darkness, not in the sense that I was but in a much deeper sense. The Covid pandemic has thrown many people into darkness. The darkness of bereavement; the darkness of loneliness; the darkness of insecurity caused by loss of earnings; the darkness of illness; the darkness of depression and , the darkness of drug or alcohol addiction and so on. For many people today life is a dark tunnel and many are having difficulty in seeing the light at the end of it.

Maybe it was a lot like that for Mary Magdalen when she came to the tomb early that third day after Jesus had been crucified. It says in the passage that we heard from John’s gospel that “it was still dark” and it’s my guess that that was the case not only because the sun had not yet risen but also because of the grief that she was feeling. Jesus, her friend for the last three years, who had accepted her in spite of her former sinful life, was no longer with her. Along with all the disciples she was stunned by the events that had taken place in Jerusalem. Having listened to Jesus, watched him heal the sick, felt his love and compassion and then watch him humiliated, tortured, nailed to a cross between two criminals and left there to die in agony, it was no wonder she was in a dark place, her world had been shattered, the light of her life had gone out so to speak.

For us today, Easter morning is full of hope, a day that speaks of new beginnings, but for Mary and the followers of Jesus on that first Easter day it was anything but. Jesus was dead and buried, and they were left reeling, broken, devastated. When she set off while it was still dark, she did not do so with any sense of expectation but with a heavy heart, going simply to make her last tearful farewell. Or so she thought. What happened next was to transform her life in a way that she could scarcely have dreamt possible.

And so she came to the tomb to offer Jesus’ body a final expression of her love, only to find the stone rolled away and his body missing. It was the final straw and, in her panic, all she could think to do was to run and find the disciples to share the bad news. In turn their instinct was to run too…to see if Mary had got it right and so they went back to the tomb with her and sadly were able to confirm what she had reported to them. When they actually looked inside the tomb, they saw the discarded burial cloths. What more proof did they need? The body of Jesus had indeed disappeared and so they, rather dejectedly I suppose, returned home although the scripture does tell us that John did wonder if it could possibly be true that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead just as he had promised. Maybe there was a glimmer of hope after all.

But Mary didn’t leave, she was too upset to go anywhere. She stayed weeping because at that moment there was no hope. Then, through her tears, she saw two angels inside the tomb who asked her why she was crying and she explained that someone had taken away the body. It was then that Jesus came to Mary and asked her the same question. Why are you weeping? Of course she didn’t recognise him; she wasn’t looking for him was she? She was looking for a dead body. No wonder she didn’t recognise him. She even thought it might be the gardener and that he might have moved the body. It was only when he said her name that all became clear. The darkness cleared as she wiped away her tears. Jesus was alive. As she tried to embrace him , he told her not to hold on to him but to go and tell the others that he had risen. It seems that in spite of Jesus being alive, life would not return to normal as she had hoped. She was confused but she did as Jesus asked and as a result of her witness others too believed the good news.

I don’t find it surprising that Mary and the disciples had refused to believe what Jesus had told them on more than one occasion while he was with them. He had tried to warn them that he would be killed and that on the third day he would rise again But it didn’t seem possible that he must suffer at the hands of cruel men and be put to death in order that the ultimate sacrifice could be paid for the sins of the world. How could he possibly overcome death and rise again to new life after three days. It was hard to believe then and it’s still hard to believe today. Indeed each of the first disciples had to go through a process of being convinced – of being convinced either by Jesus himself, like Thomas, or by the overwhelming testimony of others who have seen him. That being so, it’s hardly surprising that what was true of Mary and the disciples is so often true for us.

We hear the message that Jesus proclaimed. We witness the miracles that he performs in other people’s lives. But when it comes to the hard times, the times of trial and the times of loss and mourning, times that so many have endured or are still experiencing during the Pandemic, it can be so very hard to believe in what Jesus has said about being raised on the third day, so very hard to believe that not only was he raised – but that we too will be raised, that death does not in fact have the last word.

Why do you weep? said the angels and Jesus, and there are many ways to answer that question. Indeed there are many good reasons to weep. So many causes of darkness and despair which can cause us to doubt. But today – Easter Sunday, the empty tomb, the angels, Mary’s encounter with Jesus and indeed the existence of the church itself is a reminder to us that while there are many reasons to weep, there is also a great reason to rejoice.

Jesus was crucified – he died and he was laid in the tomb but that tomb could not hold him and because of him – it cannot hold any of those whom God loves.

Death is not the end of the story of Jesus nor is it the end of our stories for when we look around – the signs of God’s love are all about us in the midst of our world’s troubles and turmoil. When we look around us, we need to listen for the voice of the one who called Mary by name in the garden, to speak to us. For Jesus’ story is not over.

If it were over, if Christ was not raised, the church would never have come into existence for there’s no way the disciples would have gone on, in the face of the opposition they encountered, to proclaim that God raised him from the dead on the third day and that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

They would never have passed to us their testimony for they would have had nothing to testify about for on that day they did not believe despite all that Jesus had said and done before he died.

Let us thank God for today. Let us thank God for Mary and for all the other disciples who did not believe. Let us thank God for them because their faith tells us that there is hope for us when we weep; hope for us when we do not believe; hope for us when we face the cross and the tomb and feel despair rising up within us.

But most of all let us thank God today for the living Christ – for Jesus of Nazareth – God’s anointed one – for the one who was raised up on the third day and who for us has broken the power of sin and death. Let us take hold of the certainty that nothing can undo the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It has happened. And nothing can separate us from the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Not even Covid19. Not even death. Nothing can change the reality that you and I are named individuals – unique and precious – known by God and known by name.

In our confusion, in our ‘not understanding’, and in our places of darkness, fear and grief, Jesus draws closer than close, not in physical body but in spirit. And Jesus speaks our name and invites us to speak his – to reach out and to say yes to his love and his forgiveness.

**The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

**Let us pray**

Gracious God we thank you that you have always been with us, in the bad times as well as the good, the difficult as well as the easy, the sad as well as the happy.

We thank you that, though we have often been uncertain of the way ahead, you have guided us; though we have been discouraged you have given us fresh inspiration; though we have been in despair, you have given us hope.

We thank you for the assurance that Easter brings of your love that never ceases, your mercies that are new every morning and of your great faithfulness.

Give us confidence in the days ahead so that whatever problems we face, whatever disappointments we may experience, whatever sorrows may befall us, whenever the path before us seems dark, we shall still find reason to look forward, reason to believe in the future and reason to hope. Amen.

**Hymn to lead into our service of Communion**

**Jesus is king (CMP 366)**

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| 1.. Jesus is king and I will extol Him,  give Him the glory, and honour His name;  He reigns on high, enthroned in the heavens  Word of the Father, exalted for us. | 2.. We have a hope that is steadfast and certain, gone through the curtain and touching the throne;  we have a Priest who is there interceding  pouring His grace on our lives day by day. |
| 3.. We come to Him, our Priest and Apostle,  clothed in His glory and bearing His name,  laying our lives with gladness before Him -  filled with His Spirit we worship the King. | 4.. 'O Holy One, our hearts do adore You;  thrilled with Your goodness we give You our praise!'  Angels in light with worship surround Him -  Jesus, our Saviour, for ever the same. |
| Wendy Churchill 1981 Authentic Publishing/CopyCare ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 | |

At this point in our service, it’s time to take our minds back to the night before Jesus was crucified when he shared a meal with his disciples and warned them of what lay before him…betrayal, agony and death. As he shared the bread and wine he helped his friends to think of this simple meal as a means of remembering which we continue to re-enact even today.

Does life bring confusion, a string of questions that you can’t answer?

Remember that Jesus wrestled with doubts that night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Does life bring pain? Remember the pain that Jesus suffered as he hung on the cross.

Does life bring despair, a sense of being alone?

Remember that Jesus cried out “My God why have you abandoned me?”

Whatever life brings, whatever you may face, remember that God is with us. He endures our sorrow, shares our suffering and knows what it is to feel alone.

In the bread and wine we are reminded that Christ was broken but he has risen. He will come again. There is light after darkness. There is life after death.

**Let’s pray**

Lord Jesus as you requested, so we come in memory of you to share in the bread and wine of communion.

Grant that as we eat and drink together, we may also welcome you into our hearts and receive you into our lives, so that we may remember you in the best possible way, honouring you in word and deed and offering faithful service in your name.

Let’s say together the Lord’s prayer using these words

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed is your name

Your kingdom come, Your will be done

On earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are your’s

Now and forever. Amen

In his gospel narrative Matthew tells us of that final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

**27**Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. **28**This is my blood of the[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+26&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24083b)] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **29**I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

So following his example we too give thanks

Gracious God, again we are reminded how much you love us. We thank you that Jesus has called us his friends, that as we eat together despite the fact that we are separated and in our own homes, he is by our side, there to guide, support and bless. On this Easter day we thank you for his victory over death itself, for the assurance of eternal life and the assurance that he will come again to establish his kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

To lead us into the time of sharing the bread and wine, I’d like to read the words that we often sing when we are together in church

*Broken for me, broken for you*

*The body of Jesus broken for you.*

This is my body given for you

Eat it remembering I died for you

Let us eat the bread together

*Broken for me, broken for you*

*The body of Jesus broken for you.*

This is my blood I shed for you

For your forgiveness making you new

Let us drink the wine; a symbol of the blood of Jesus shed for us.

He was broken to bring us healing, crushed to set us free, killed so that we might live.

But he is alive, risen, victorious; The King of kings and Lord of lords

To God be praise now and always.

It is our privilege now to bring our concerns to the Lord in prayer

We pray for our world of so much good and yet so much evil, so much joy yet so much sorrow, so much beauty and yet so much ugliness.

We pray for those who have plenty and those who have little, for those for whom life brings pleasure and those for whom it brings pain,

We remember all who celebrate and all who mourn, all who look forward with confidence and all who view the future with dread.

We pray for the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, praying for an end to the Covid pandemic

We pray for the well fed and the hungry, the employed and the unemployed, the free and the oppressed, the comfortably housed and the homeless., for those who live at peace and those in war torn countries

We pray for our world with all its contrasts and for the situations that people face day by day. Help us to remember that everyone, everywhere matter to us because they matter to you and so help us to respond wherever we are able.

We ask our prayer in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus. Amen

**We sing our last hymn Thine be the glory 689**

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| 1. 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. | 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 has lost its sting. |
| 3.. No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life;  life is nought 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. | Chorus: Thine be the glory,  risen, conquering Son,  endless is the victory  Thou o'er death hast won. |
| Edmond Budry 1854-1932 tr. R Birch Hoyle (1875-1939) ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 | |

**The Blessing**

To him who bore our sorrows to win us joy;

Who took on darkness to bring us light,

Who was broken to make us whole

And who endured death to secure us life,

be praise and glory, now and for ever.   
Amen

We say the Grace together

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all on this Easter Day and forevermore. Amen

This service has been prepared by Margaret Ogden, a non -serving elder at Bamford Chapel and Norden URC