

# Southside Worship Online

4 April 2021

*To prepare yourself to worship, you are invited to spend a few minutes settling yourself into a comfortable space. Close your eyes. Slow your breathing. Become aware of what you can feel in and around your body – what you can hear, or feel, or smell. Acknowledge the distractions around and within you and bring them with you into worship. You may like to light a candle to help centre your thoughts toward the love and presence of the living God.*

## Call to worship

This is the day of celebration. Good news, Christ is alive! Easter jubilations fill the air. The bright colours of life have returned. Cast off your sorrow, your mourning, your shroud. Let us welcome the Lord with cries of joy, hearty and loud.

## Prayer of adoration

Risen Lord, we greet you on this happy morning. The holiest of weeks has come to an end. Out of darkness comes light, out of despair comes hope, out of death comes life. The tomb is empty; you are alive.

Risen Lord give us a glimpse of your life-giving glory, a sense of your living word. Death could not contain you; your power of goodness has been unleashed. Let us draw strength in this worship, for we are ready to walk with you into the world; ready to be used by your spirit, to set love free for the good of all. Amen.

**Song** *Come People of the Risen King*

## Prayer of confession

Living Lord, with joy and a sense of relief, we acknowledge that the cross was not the end. The cross stands as the symbol of all that the world got wrong and all that we continue to get wrong today. We are sorry for our complicity in a society that can all too easily turn aside from the values of the Kingdom. We let injustices run rampant, doing nothing to stop them. We watch as the poorest are denied their liberty, washing our hands of it as if it is nothing to do with us. We settle for the way things are instead of fighting for change. We too readily criticise others and hurt people by our ungracious words, not realising the harm we cause. Today we celebrate the empty tomb– the doorway standing wide open that releases your living spirit into the world. We are sorry for our words, actions and lack of activity that limits the potency of Easter; that lessens the impact Easter's promise has on the world. Forgive us and remind us that the cross will never be the end. Amen.

**Bible Reading** Luke 24:1-12

## Sermon

**Song** *Anchor*

## Offering

Lord God, you have given us much from the stores of your love. Your pockets are deep, and you keep giving; time after time we experience your gracious hand as it provides us with blessing after blessing. In comparison we have little to give—or so we think. Today, in making our offering, we do so recognise the immense cost of love revealed by the cross and empty tomb, and we come with thankfulness for your gift to us. May we be generous and fulsome in the commitments we make, as we live our lives faithfully as your servants in the world. Amen.



## **Prayers of intercession**

We thank you, Gracious God, for you have done marvellous things!

When the world was walking in darkness, you came as light. Not the light of a bright star alone—but the light of Jesus, Prince of Peace.

When we were kneeling in weakness, you came as teacher. Through his parables and conversations, Jesus of Nazareth opened our eyes to a stronger humanity that would live by a set of new rules.

When some were feeling worthless, you came as friend and physician. By the healing love of Jesus your son, many were given acceptance and were brought to new life.

When we were needing forgiveness, you came as sacrifice. By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, mercy came in the form of unconditional and unabated love.

For all of this we give you thanks, on this holiest of days. Compassionate God, we come before you with an active focus on those people in the world who are suffering. Although we know joy and see reason to be hopeful, many this day live with real challenge in their lives. We pray for the grieving and the lonely, for the young who deserve special care, and the old who equally deserve the best we can give, for those who are prejudiced against others

and who live behind barriers of fear and suspicion, for those who are sick at home or in hospital, for those who have been damaged by the actions of others, and for those who know no other way than to succumb to their temptations.

God of love, promise and hope, this day reminds us of a new dawn and of a different world. Let us live, united in spirit, and ready to serve our brothers and sisters in the world, that they too may know the blessings of your generous love. Amen.

**Song** *Cornerstone*

## **Benediction**

As we have worshipped, so we take our worship into the world. When we walk uncertain into the garden, we leave rejoicing! Where we meet the stranger, we encounter love! When we are sent to share the news, we shout it loud! God of yesterday, today and tomorrow, Son of resurrection and hope, Spirit of rejoicing hearts, bless us, this day and always

## **We had hoped**

"We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" these are some of the words that the 2 disciples speak to the stranger on the road to Emmaus. They are dejected and defeated. They had placed hope in Jesus, and now, before they hear the news of his resurrection they are returning home, back to the life they knew before, in the misplaced expectation that nothing had changed and that all their hope was gone.

I think that it is a feeling shared amongst many of the other disciples. The women who go to the tomb, the men who stay behind locked in the upper room. All of them are dealing with the loss of hope because of what seemed to them, the failure of Jesus to achieve what he set out to do.

It would be great if today, our celebration of Easter involved a celebration that no longer would there be virus that destroy lives, that no longer would our relationships be ruined by death, that our lives would become smooth sailing, that all people would experience justice, mercy and equity.

But that is not to be, just yet. All that and so much more is promised to us in the coming again of Jesus. Revelation 21:1 – 4 says, "Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The promise of perfection, or an end to all that separates us from God, of all that limits us has been won. On Friday we dwelt on the utter depravity of humanity. The darkness that causes people to kill and maim, to demean and abuse, to overpower and exploit loses all its power because of this day.

Someone in our congregation sent me this quote during the week. "Life today is far from God's dream for the world. We know that much in the world is not just or righteous or morally good. Systems of oppression weigh heavily on people, and corruption brings pain. Justice comes in seeing what is wrong in these systems and actively working to change them. Justice comes when we feed the hungry and act to change food distribution systems. Justice flows when we choose to stand with and for the voiceless and the disenfranchised. Justice demonstrates our care for God's world."

There is hope that is dashed. Hope that what we wanted to see that doesn't come to be. But there is another type of hope. The hope that comes from seeing, hearing and believing that God is at work in this world.

This hope is seen in our reading this morning. Hope is seen as the women at the tomb are reminded of the words of Jesus.

Tragedy hits a delete button in our minds, causing us to forget the things God has taught us.

Jesus invested a lot of time trying to prepare his disciples for what lay ahead. According to John's gospel, Jesus spent hours instructing, preparing, and warning them. However, when Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten and then crucified, the delete button in their minds was pushed. It was only the angels prodding that restarted the women's memory, and as they stared at the empty tomb they started to remember.

This is why it is so important to fill our minds with the fullness of God whilst things are going well, so that we have something to draw on when hope fades. But also, to remain connected with God through his church when things go bad. So that there is the opportunity to be reminded of his promises again and again.

Hope in the words of Jesus, help us to see God's great plan unfolding before our very eyes.

The first followers of Jesus simply couldn't comprehend how God could be working in their tragedy. Twenty-four hours earlier the disciples were enjoying a meal with Jesus. They couldn't comprehend the fact that he was now dead and buried. The hands that had healed the sick were pierced and lifeless; the mouth that had spoken words of authority was now silent; and the feet that had carried the good news were bruised and bloodied, as Jesus lay dead in the tomb.

Where was God's plan in this? Surely God had forsaken them! Some terrible miscarriage of justice had occurred! Surely God had lost control of his creation and now it was careening out of control into utter chaos!

Where was God's plan in all of this? It is found in verse seven of our text. The angel said, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again."

The angel was quoting Jesus. And that word, 'must,' is key. It had to happen because it was part of God's plan to accomplish the forgiveness of our sins.

Now, there will be some who will say that some or all of the bad things that happen to us are the results of God's direct intervention. People who say "God made me sick so I would learn to slow down." Or God sent the coronavirus as a punishment for all types of specific things.

I do not believe any of that. A God of love does not indiscriminately send tragedies on people. But God does bring good out of the bad that happens in this world.

Paul, who probably suffered more than most any man, said, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Our hopes are dashed when things don't turn out the way that we want or expect. But yet God continues to have something in store for us.

And finally, hope becomes real when we live and act on it.

When the women returned to the other disciples, they shared something that was out of the ordinary. If they'd returned and said, "yep, his body was there, we anointed it and sealed the tomb again," there would be nothing for us to talk about 2000 years later. Or even if they'd returned and said "guess what, Jesus is alive. He'd only fainted on the cross, he came too, he'd hungry and thirsty, but he never died." Again, there's no story in that.

But when God works in miraculous ways. In ways that we never thought possible, we have a story to share.

The disciples started that first Easter Sunday with a sense of loss and hopelessness. "We had hoped" is a phrase that I'm sure we've all spoken at sometime in our lives. But by the end of the day, all their hope was restored.

When the stone was rolled away, hope was released. Hope that changed the world. Hope that caused people to die, hope that caused people to live beyond themselves, hope that led people to bring about justice for the poor and marginalised, who sought to heal the sick, come alongside the lonely. Who sought to ensure that children and women were treated with respect and dignity.

Have we come as far as we should, no way! But in Christ there is always more to come. Amen.