

Call to Worship

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: 'So you want to see the risen Jesus? Remember to look in the less likely places: not in the Temple, but by the lakeside; not in full view, but hidden in plain sight; not dining with the rich, but preparing food to share; not in the centres of power, but always on the margins. Now come and see!'

Hymn – All hail the power of Jesus' Name!

Prayer of Adoration & Praise

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Holy One, we gather before you this day, we come to meet you in this time of worship, we come to meet you in the risen Jesus, we come to wonder at the resurrection.

We know of the cycle of life and death, we trust in the truth of life eternal because of the resurrection of Jesus, because we have met or hope to meet the risen Christ ourselves.

We do not claim to understand resurrection, but we trust in you, O God and in your son, Jesus. Our human minds are prone to doubt, forgive us Lord God, for those times we allow ourselves to give into those thoughts.

We fear the cost to ourselves for faith and service, forgive us when we fail to choose the right path.

Strengthen our resolve to believe, chase away all fear and give us courage to take up our cross and follow where Jesus leads.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say;

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Readings: 1 John 3: 1 - 7

See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact, we are. This is why the world does not know us: it has not known God. ² My dear friends, we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure.

⁴ Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law. ⁵ You know that Christ appeared in order to take away sins, and that there is no sin in him. ⁶ So everyone who lives in union with Christ does not continue to sin; but whoever continues to sin has never seen him or known him.

⁷ Let no one deceive you, my children! Whoever does what is right is righteous, just as Christ is righteous.

Luke 24: 36b – 48

suddenly the Lord himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were terrified, thinking that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ But he said to them, "Why are you alarmed? Why are these doubts coming up in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet, and see that it is I myself. Feel me, and you will know, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you can see I have."

⁴⁰ He said this and showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ They still could not believe, they were so full of joy and wonder; so he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of cooked fish, ⁴³ which he took and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are the very things I told you about while I was still with you: everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms had to come true."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three days later, ⁴⁷ and in his name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Hymn – Will you come and follow me

Sermon – ‘Witnessing’

I wonder this morning, are you a witness? A witness is someone who has, or who claims to have, or is thought by someone with authority to compel testimony to have, knowledge relevant to an event or other matter of interest. There are different types of witnesses.

There is the eyewitness – who testifies what they have perceived through their senses – seeing, hearing, smelling, touching. There is the hearsay witness – who testifies to what someone else may have said or written.

There is the expert witness – someone who specialised knowledge relevant to a particular case or event. There is the reputation witness – who testifies about the reputation of a person or business entity, when reputation is material to the issue being disputed.

Jesus said to His followers, sometime after Easter, *‘You are witnesses of these things.’*

In today’s Gospel reading we find a group of witnesses who seem confused, tricked and intimidated. The first Disciples and friends of Jesus were being scared by their own shadows and living under illusion. They could not see the reality that Jesus had risen from the dead.

In part, this was because they were conditioned to think in a certain way, like I am conditioned to think anything small, and dark is a spider on the loose. The Disciples, like all Jews, were expecting a Messiah. They thought he would be the one who would sort out the Romans, rule justly, and champion the cause of the Jews. They thought they had found their man in Jesus, and they tried to put ‘their money where their mouth was’ by backing Him. So, when Jesus was crucified – their whole lives fell apart.

That was it. Their hopes and dreams crushed and broken. They thought they knew how the story went and therefore the story had come to an end. They might as well go back to their fishing boats. The Disciples had been wrong about Jesus, he was not the Messiah they had been waiting for, and so, in the Resurrection, they were repeatedly being confronted with a reality that, for them, was unexpected. Jesus had come back from the dead. He was alive! They did not understand that and so were still seeing ‘bogeymen’ in the shadows and missing the point of what it meant that Jesus had Risen.

Now, the trouble is, that we *do* know what happened to Jesus and why, and, as they say, hindsight is a wonderful thing. Imagine if you thought you knew the ending to a story, and it turned out differently. Let us take Goldilocks and the Three Bears for example. I guess you all know that story, but it did not quite happen as it is usually told. The bears returned home and went to the dining table to sit down for breakfast. Daddy Bear said: 'Who has been eating my breakfast?' and Baby Bear said, 'Who has been eating my breakfast?' and Mummy Bear said, 'Oh do not be so silly! We've just got home from a walk and you haven't made breakfast yet Daddy Bear!' That is not the ending we were expecting. We are, perhaps, surprised by a twist in the tale.

So, it was for the Disciples. This group of men and women expected one thing from Jesus, and when He died, they seemed to get another. Yet, the reality of what happened was totally different again and it was a surprise. Jesus had gone through death and come out of the other side. What a twist to the tale! The Disciples had to get their heads around it. They had to realise that they had missed the point and that their idea of Jesus had largely been based on an illusion. Now it was time to face reality.

Jesus really was alive; he was not a figment of their imaginations. He could be touched; He could eat, and He could be talked to. Jesus was alive. Jesus was real – and what a reality! This is a whole new way of seeing God and relating to Him. It is a whole new way of thinking and being. Throughout His time on earth, Jesus had tried to explain it to them, but they did not understand.

Now, He explains it again and in the light of the resurrection, it makes sense. They see! Rejoice and exult with all your heart. The Lord has taken away any judgement of you. God is in our midst. God loves and saves everyone – no matter how much on the edges, no matter what they have done. The outcast and the lame get healed in the Name of Jesus. No shame for anyone. Whatever has gone on before is over – for a new start waits for us all. God looks at us all – each one of us – and His heart sings out with joy! In God's eyes, as a result of what Jesus accomplished on the Cross, we are all welcome as friends of God.

It is the same events, the same story, but given a completely different meaning by Jesus, to the meaning the Disciples had given it – and now the Disciples believe what Jesus says and it changed them. It changed those whom they came into with. People were healed. People began to live differently, in a countercultural way, sharing their belongings, their gifts and their time. They studied the Scriptures. Spent time in prayer.

Tried harder to understand how to follow Jesus, how to relate to a God they were suddenly seeing in a new way. They were also prepared to stand up and be counted as Christians. They had become witnesses.

We are also 'witnesses', yet what does it mean to be a witness to the Gospel, a witness to the Good News, a witness to God, a witness to Christ, and witness to the work of the Spirit? Firstly, we must not keep silent. We do not have to shout or bully people into believing, but somehow the world must see that we believe in the Risen Christ, that the power of the Resurrection to heal and to forgive is real.

For, Jesus commissions each one of us to take His message of unconditional love to all people and to witness to it, to share it, speak it, spread it, teach it and most importantly, to the best of our abilities, to live it.

In our reading from the First Letter of John, John writes, *'we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is.'*

None of us knows precisely what the future holds. Just when we think we have our life planned out, something happens which demolishes those well-laid plans. These are the things that our rational mind can never fully comprehend.

That is the essence of faith.

However, this does not discredit our joy, or our love, or our hope in the Risen Jesus. It is precisely these moments when our hope, love and joy may be most powerfully real. Jesus yearns for us to be swept away, to have the faith of a child. It is our heart that will lead us where we need to go, bring us to what we need to see and inform us of what we need to say, but only if we let it. Our culture teaches to forgive and forget. Perhaps, the Resurrection teaches us something different – to remember and forgive. This is what we need to witness to the world.

The Resurrection is not something we can logically dismantle into its various parts. It is not a jigsaw puzzle that fits neatly together. It is God's way of saying, 'I love you'. That fear and wonder are real but hope and reconciliation are even more real. Now and always, may we give in to that spirit of joyful disbelief that empowers our faith in Jesus.

Over the last couple of months, I have become more and more struck by the thought that now, more than ever, you and I must 'step up' and truly 'live' as witnesses for Jesus. It sounds like a daunting task – but it always was and always has been. A comforting thought – we at least have over two thousand years of Christian witness behind us.

Just imagine what it must have felt like for the first followers of Jesus. On the road to Jerusalem and being told to go beyond. A couple of handfuls of people. Not the brightest or the best, a mixed bunch of experience and commitment. Far from perfect; but who did not shy away from what Jesus was asking them to do and to be. *'You are witnesses of these things.'*

So are we, and it is time for us to get out into our community and share what we feel and believe and love – it is time for us to be witnesses.

In the Name of the Loving Father, the Risen Son, and the Guiding Spirit. Amen.

Hymn – All heaven declares

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Life giver, we marvel at the make-up of our frail human bodies, entering the world as tiny, helpless babes and growing slowly over the years, developing and changing in so many ways, prone to illness and easily damaged yet resilient and quick to heal given the right treatments.

Jesus lived a human life, he knew exactly what it feels like to be hungry, to suffer pain, to laugh and feel joy.

Through his life, his death and his resurrection we see more clearly what it means to be human and what our role here on earth is.

Lord, you have created people of every kind, and each one represents a part of you.

You have made some to make new scientific discoveries, some to explore the world of academia, some to govern, some to deal with business or finance, some to tend the poor and sick, some to assist the bereaved and lonely, some to care for the abused

and abuser, some to nurture children, some to guide the lost; for everything people need you have created a person to fill that role.

Thank you, Lord, for all the people you have created and for all they do to make our world a better place. Help us to be all we can be, all you have made us to be, to follow and serve wherever you lead. Amen.

Hymn – Be Thou my Vision,

Benediction

May we go from here, full of hope and joy. May we go from here, knowing that through the resurrection, we are forgiven, loved and free. May the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love, this day and forevermore. Amen.

Closing Song – The Blessing (Multilingual from Dubai)