

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
12 APRIL 2020 – EASTER SUNDAY

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Holy God, we come to you on this day celebrating the Resurrection, the new life you have given us through your Son, Jesus the Christ. We are called to living this new life in covenant with one another. We are called to love one another, to forgive one another. We pray always for your kingdom, your reign to come, and your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. As we celebrate eternal life today, help us to know that this life begins now. New life is given to us now. Call us into your ways of kingdom-building here on earth through love, peace, reconciliation and healing. In the name of the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

CHRIST IS RISEN! (HE IS RISEN INDEED!)

SONG [Christ the Lord is risen today](#) CCLI 27965

PSALM 118:1,2,14-24

Give thanks to the LORD, who alone is good;
whose steadfast love is everlasting!
The LORD is my strength and my might;
the LORD is my salvation.
Let the gates of righteousness be opened
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.
This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.
I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.
This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Each morning, we put on those comfortable garments
of burdens and worries,
but now they are gone!

Each day, we walk through life,
our good and faithful friend, death, at our side,
constantly whispering in our ears,
but now he has disappeared!

Each evening, empty our fears out of our pockets,
Leaving them on top of the dresser,
but now, they have been taken away!

We could continue to live in the same old ways, the same old days,
but now, resurrection life is ours, and we can sing, dance, and rejoice with you,
God in Community, Holy in One, we pray. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess our fears to you, O God. We confess that we are afraid of death. We are afraid of finality. We are afraid of not living into our dreams or satisfying our desires. We are afraid of not accomplishing what we set out to do.

Forgive us for focusing on worldly values, Eternal God. Forgive us for focusing on worldly gain, God of Everlasting Love. Forgive us for not living into the trust that your love reigns forever, and that death does not have the final word.

May we rest assured in the promises of your love through your Son, Jesus the Christ who lived and died and lives again, for us all. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Christ has died; Christ has risen; Christ will come again! We proclaim the ancient promise in our hearts, and may it settle there as truth, that we know in our heart of our hearts that God's love endures forever. This world, this life may pass away, but God's love endures forever because of Christ our Lord. Go, live into the Good News, and share God's love with all. Amen.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Be at peace.
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG [The wonder of your cross](#) CCLI 4372956

BIBLE READINGS

[Jeremiah 31:1-6](#)

[Acts 10:34-43](#)

[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

[The Resurrection](#) (link to YouTube reading – for the children)

SERMON [The centrality of the resurrection](#)

SONG [King Of Kings](#) CCLI 7127647

AN EASTER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH - *by Brian Miller*

We believe in God the Father, who created the world,
was faithful when we were not,
and who continuously seeks to redeem the world.

We believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ,
who humbled himself by becoming human
and moving into our neighbourhood;
was sent by the Father to give us life;
embodied and taught the righteous love of God;
and who, though he knew no sin, became sin
and was put to death on a cross.

We believe that three days later,
Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God;
was seen in bodily form by his disciples.

We believe that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
gives us victory over any form of sin and brokenness
and allows us to know the full love of God for the world.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who actively works in our lives, giving us grace to be like Jesus,
and sends us to show God's love for the world. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Eternal God of all creation, judge of the living and the dead, forgive us for our warring madness. You created this world to be good, and we have divided it into nations and peoples that compete and overpower each other. We pray for an end to all violence - in homes, in neighbourhoods, and among nations. Bring peace where we sow prejudice, hatred and anger. Bring consolation where there is loss. Bring hope to all your people, those who do not know you personally and those who daily seek your loving guidance for their lives. (Acts 10: 34-43)

Steadfast Lord God, help us to know death as the gateway to eternal life, your loving gift to all believers. You provided salvation to all creation through Jesus Christ, you dear son. Help us to celebrate your gift by telling others of our joy in your constant presence. Raise up faithful preachers, teachers and volunteers for your Church. Let us rejoice and be glad in each day that you have made. (Ps 118: 1-2, 14-24)

Glorious Lord God, you have called us to be your servants, to proclaim your good news to all through our actions as well as our words. Encourage us to share from the abundance we call our own, to be bold in our proclamation of your love, to embrace those society shuns, to speak out for the oppressed - keeping our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Our lives are yours; reveal your glory through us. (Colossians 3: 1-4)

Compassionate Lord God, send your holy angels to console those who mourn - to comfort those whose health is failing and to those who care for them, to bring hope to all who seek wholeness in their daily lives.

Today, we pray especially for...

As your angels brought good news of resurrection to Mary, bring good news to all who seek your will for their lives. (John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10)

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG [Because he lives \(Amen\)](#) CCLI 7027887

WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING

Go now, glad and rejoicing,
for Christ is risen and has become your saviour.
Set your minds on the things of God
for your lives are hidden in Christ.
Preach and testify that he is the one ordained by God
to judge the living and the dead.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
The love of God
And the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit
Be with you all and remain with you always. Amen.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

Easter Sunday Year A

Jer. 31:1-6; Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Mt. 28:1-10

12/04/2020

You probably do not remember the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. During his day he was as powerful a man as there was on earth. A Russian Communist leader, he took part in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. He was editor of the Soviet newspaper Pravda (which, by the way, means truth), and was a full member of the Politburo. His works on economics and political science are still read today. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity hurling insult, argument, and proof against it.

An hour later he was finished. He looked out at what seemed to be the smouldering ashes of people's faith. "Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium but then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Finally he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: "CHRIST IS RISEN!" En masse the entire crowd arose as one and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

So, I say to you this morning: CHRIST IS RISEN! (HE IS RISEN INDEED!). I am convinced! I have faith that Christ was dead and he was buried. That I believe. But, this too I accept as true: He rose from the dead and will come again in glory.

There is little debate in the church that the resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. It's an event that is celebrated throughout the world. Yes, it is true that the secular world has, to a large extent, taken over this celebration and used it for commercial gain. That starts quite early, right after Christmas when hot cross buns go on sale—followed shortly after by chocolate Easter bunnies and chocolate eggs. But, in spite of this, our celebration of the resurrection can, and should, have great significance for all of us. After all, it *is* the celebration of the risen Christ, who died and rose again.

But why is this important? Surely it's enough that Christ died for our sins. We all recognize the importance of that. Why, then is his subsequent resurrection so essential to our faith? Indeed, why is it central to the Christian faith?

Well, the resurrection of Jesus *is* important. It *is* significant. It *is*, in fact, essential. It is significant for a number of reasons, but primarily it's significant for the contribution it makes to a more complete understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. As a result of this, the resurrection of Jesus is an indispensable part of God's plan for our salvation.

For a start, the humanity of Jesus is only conceivable if the resurrection was a real event. If Jesus was not truly human or did not really suffer on the cross, then the resurrection is of no value to the Christian faith. It's a tenet of the Christian faith that Jesus was not only fully divine, but was also fully human. As a fully human person, Jesus Christ identified with our pain and suffering. He experienced what it was like to live with the limitations of humanity.

More importantly, though, is Jesus' identification with our sin. We heard, just a few days ago, on Good Friday, that Jesus died for our sin or sins. That's a significant part of the Good Friday service of remembrance. While, Jesus grew up without sin and lived his life in sinless fellowship with his Father—on the cross, he took upon himself the sin of all humanity. We are told in the Scriptures that the wages of sin is death. It is, and Jesus lovingly laid down his own life so that we (i.e. you and me) would not have to suffer the eternal consequences of our sin. He could not have done so, had he not been fully human.

The resurrection, therefore, authenticates the humanity of Jesus, which was also necessary for his identification with all people.

We also need to recognize that the act of resurrection is always an act of God. Although, Jesus proved that he had power over death, evidenced very profoundly in the raising of Lazarus—and although Jesus claimed to have the power to lay down his life and to take it up again, the New Testament does not suggest that the resurrection was an independent act of Jesus.

The power behind the raising of Lazarus and the power behind Jesus' own resurrection was the power of God, himself. Indeed, the resurrection is regarded as the supreme display of God's power. It's the way in which God has provided a path from death to life, beginning with his own Son, Jesus Christ. Baptism highlights this essential character of the resurrection. In it, we are called to die to ourselves—a parallel to Christ's death—and

as a reflection of Christ's resurrection, we are called to new life—a life, lived in and through Jesus Christ. By its very nature, then, it is an essential part of God's plan for the redemption of humanity.

The resurrection of Jesus, however, does not only display the power of God, it also expresses God's satisfaction with what Christ has done, in dying on the cross for our sin.

Christ's exultation or triumph, through the resurrection, is a vindication of his mission. It shows us that God approved of the life and ministry of Jesus...and his death on the cross for our sins. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, there would be no certainty that his death had effected anything. Humankind would still be bound in its sin and there would be no assurance of salvation. For this reason, also, the resurrection is indispensable to humanity's salvation.

The crucifixion, therefore, does have an ongoing effect. Jesus is identified by the angel in the tomb as "the one who was crucified" or "the crucified one." This doesn't mean that the crucifixion was just a temporary episode in the life of the Son of God—a past event that has now been nullified or transcended—or that his crucifixion has now been replaced by his resurrection. No! The title refers to Jesus, who was crucified and whose crucifixion, while a completed event, has ongoing consequences for our salvation.

The events, that Matthew records in his account of the resurrection, also highlight another aspect of the resurrection, that's also important for our Christian faith. As Jesus Christ gave himself for us, on the cross, so he calls us to give ourselves to a life of discipleship.

The angel commands the myrrh-bearing women to carry the message of the resurrected Christ to the other disciples. And like the women who went to the tomb, we are called to proclaim the message of the resurrected Christ. The angel said, "Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead...'"

The message of the resurrection is not something to keep to yourself. It's to be proclaimed throughout the earth. It was not a message that was to be for the disciples only—it was not for Jerusalem only—it is a message for all.

The reference, in the text, to Galilee, is not just simply a geographical designation but a theological one. Galilee was the place where Jesus spent most of his time in his earthly ministry. It was known at the time, as Galilee of the Gentiles. As such, it provided the appropriate setting for Jesus' Great Commission, when he said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

However, the command to tell the news of Christ's resurrection doesn't just stop there. The resurrection assures us of Christ's continuing presence with us.

We read that as the women were on their way to fulfil their mission, they were joined by the risen Christ, himself. For Matthew, this provides a paradigm for the reassuring presence of the risen Christ in the missionary activity of the church and for us as individuals. The resurrected Christ goes with us on the way. This is a part of his ongoing ministry. With Jesus at the right hand of God, he also intercedes for us and presents our worship to God, for it is through the risen Christ that we pray and worship God.

As we begin to understand the significance of the resurrection, for us, we are able to echo the words of the apostle Paul, which he wrote in his letter to the church at Corinth...

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (1Cor. 15:14-17)

The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is not some added extra to make the gospel more exciting. It's certainly not there as some kind of circumstantial evidence to convince the doubter. No, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an integral part of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and indispensable for the salvation of humanity. It validates both the humanity and mission of Jesus Christ. It displays the power of God. It calls us to "new life"—a life of discipleship, of service and of proclamation. And finally, the resurrection assures us of Christ's continuing presence with us and his continual intercession before the Father, on our behalf.

To him be all the glory, honour, majesty and praise. Amen.