**Easter Day 17th April 2022**

On that first ester day women came to the tomb with spices to anoint the body of Jesus. The found the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus missing. Then angels announced to them Why do you look for the living among the dead. He is not here. He has risen.

Alleluia Christ is risen!
**He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

**Hymn Christ the Lord is Risen today**

**Invited to come and re green the cross**



**A gathering prayer**

Risen Lord,
in the stillness and wonder of this moment,
we hardly dare to believe that you are indeed alive!
Yet our hearts are filling with faith, hope and love,
and our souls are beginning to believe!
Wonderful Lord, we fall on our knees with thanksgiving.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Creator God, giver of life;
Jesus Christ, Lord of life;
Holy Spirit, pulse of life:
we bring you our ‘alleluias’ and our thanks
for the joy, the hope and the wonder
of the Resurrection – which we celebrate today.
**Amen.**



 **A prayer of praise**

Amazing God, we praise you that
from the silence of an empty tomb,
a message of joy has spread around the world.
From the brutality of a death on a cross,
healing love has touched the whole of creation.
From the initial uncertainty of the first disciples,
your Church has grown and reached out in faith to all.
Thank you for Easter; thank you for life; thank you for
everything.
**Amen.**



**Assurance of forgiveness**

Jesus is alive! **Jesus is alive!**
Death is overcome: **Jesus is alive!**
He is your one true Son: **Jesus is alive!**
We are freed from sin: **Jesus is alive!**
Our new lives can begin: **Jesus is alive!**
On this joyful Easter Day: **Jesus is alive!**
So let us sing and dance and rejoice.
**Jesus is alive!
Amen.**

**He is risen**

**Open mic**

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Reading Luke 24.1-12**



Last week I was talking to a group of pre-schoolers about Holy Week. I had a teddy that was representing Jesus and I put teddy Jesus, wrapped in bandages, in a tomb. The children could not see that as I put teddy Jesus in the tomb, I slipped him out of the badges and pushed him to the back of the tomb and out round the back. I rolled a stone across the entrance.

Then I said on Easter day the women went to the tomb but found the stone rolled back. I rolled the stone back. But there was no Teddy Jesus. Just his bandages.

One little boy when ‘Wow that’s magic. Where’s he gone. What have you done with him!

I said, ‘That my friend, is what we’ve been asking for the last two thousand years.’

What we are doing here today is weird. Celebrating that a dead man has risen from the grave. It’s weird because it doesn’t happen. If it did, then the world would be different.

We are fed many different stories about the world and our place in it. Since the start of the Ukraine war we have witnessed Vladimir Putin’s disinformation campaign to justify the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Kremlin officials have made spurious claims all the way through. This is not a war nor an invasion but a military intervention. Russian troops are not the aggressors but are liberators from neo-Nazis elements in Ukraine.

The rest of the world has stood in condemnation of Russian aggression and have called this an invasion. But the story in Russia is a different one. The leader of the Russian Orthodox church, Patriarch Kirill has embraced a nationalist militarism making Putin’s war a Holy War. Many of his own priests believe he has betrayed the Christian faith and taken his church back to the darkest of tsarist times.

Holy Russia is represented today by courageous protesting priests and people who don’t believe the story being fed to them by the state and the Church. In every age, people have used religion to gain and hold onto power. May God bring judgement on Patriarch Kirill and his church for this blasphemy in the name of Christ.

Which story do you believe?

Every day we get fed stories by our world about who we are and what we should do.

We are consumers. The most important thing in life is having money. Money brings power and choice.

There is no god. There is no purpose to life. We are just cosmic accidents, a big bang, nothing but atoms and stardust and the fight for survival. Dog eats dog. The evolutionary principle – survival of the fittest.

Look after yourself. Be yourself – whatever that means. Be happy. Happiness is everything. Equality and dignity for all. Ok that is contradictory to the story of dog eat dog and survival of the fittest – but hey – we are all hypocrites. Different stories, depends on what we believe or what we think every one else believes? We just want to fit in and get by?

And then there’s this!

The cross and resurrection plants a flag that points to another story to live by. That there is a God, a creator of all, in whose image we are made and therefore all have dignity and value. None of us should become gun fodder on the streets of Bucha or Mariupol. None of us should be sent to Rwanda because we have the wrong colour of skin.

Why? Because we are God’s precious children.

But this world is messed up. It has been seduced into deadly and demonic stories that bring fear and hatred, division and rivalry into our hearts: all the passions that put God’s own Son Jesus on a cross. We mess up. We mess the world up. We need to say sorry to our Creator. We need forgiveness. We need to find a new vision, a new spirit to collaborate with God for a new creation.

We need hope: Hope that love will win. Hope that goodness will win. Hope that life will win.

We need resurrection. We need a Saviour.

But that is weird.

Tom Holland is a renowned historian who wrote the bestselling book ‘Dominion: The making of the western mind. It’s a history of Christianity and it was his attempt to get to the bottom of how our faith has transformed the way everyone in the west thinks and acts – or at least did – because those bearings and foundations are being untethered now. He wasn’t a person of faith but in the process of writing the book, of checking the historical evidence for the Christian faith - he found himself changed. He realized that in writing Dominion the values that he instinctively held quite strongly – like human rights and human life having an inherent value – have no underpinning except for this kind of faith. He found himself accepting this faith.

When asked what the church should do to share this faith, now our society disregards it, he said ‘*the church should stay weird. Don’t just look like the rest of the world around you, because then you just become another mouthpiece for the culture that already exists. Part of that is not being ashamed and owning the weirdness of these strange beliefs in God, in the Holy Spirit, in the idea that we are not here by accident, and that there’s a God who loves us and came to die for us and who rose again for us.*

Which story do you believe? Are we like the Russians believing our story is true but the rest of the world knows we are deluded and we have it wrong? Or is the rest of our society deluded and got the wrong story of reality?

Paul claims in the Bible, in his first letter to the Corinthians, written a couple of decades after the resurrection, that if Jesus had not been raised from the dead then our faith is a delusion. We believe in vain.

But if it is true - then it changes everything.

In a moment three people will be baptised and others will also confess their faith in Jesus as Lord. They step over from the thinking of the world into the way of Jesus. Their identity is not in the stories the world tells us but primarily in the story of Jesus.

In the Second World War, the pastor of a German hospital for incurable people was visited by Nazi officials to be told that, as his patients were a burden on the Third Reich, they would all be gassed. His reply was calm.

‘You can put me into a concentration camp if you want; that is your affair. But so long as I am free you do not touch one of my patients. I cannot change to fit the times or wishes of the Fuehrer. I stand under orders from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whose orders are you standing under?

Which stories are you being influenced by?

The Easter story tells us that the first few appearances of Jesus after his resurrection are not what we expect. They demonstrate gentleness and loving kindness rather than a blaze of glory and irresistible power. Mary is tearful and Jesus consoles her. Cleopas is walking depressed and forlorn and Jesus walks alongside him and opens the scriptures to him. Jesus shows he still has the nail scars from the cross – wounds that allude to the fact that trauma leaves a lasting legacy. Jesus’ resurrection appearances speak to the hardest emotions of human life.

Over the last twenty years there has been a growing recognition that trauma is not limited to those who have been on the battlefield; trauma is the response to any situation in which you may feel under threat or powerless. The community response of Holding Together in GL11 is trying to educate us in that.

For many of us the Covid 19 pandemic has been a crash course in this; whether or not you were personally affected by the illness, the world seemed to stop overnight. And in the face of trauma, language stops short. We might be living through uncertain times – war in Europe, a cost of living crisis and rising mental health problems – but the Easter story has a truth we can hold onto tightly.

The beauty of the Easter story is that as much as it is a story of the triumph over the grave and the forces of evil, it is also a reminder of the God who meets us in our fragility with gentleness. At Easter we remember that Jesus turned all our notions of power on their head. The stories of Mary weeping at the tomb and Cleophas bewildered, and despairing demonstrate that there is hope amid the wounding and it can be found in the person of Jesus who comes to minister to us, not through power and might, but through scars and tears. He has risen. There is hope.

**HYMN Good Christians all rejoice and sing**

**Baptisms**

**Hymn in Christ alone**

**Church Membership**

**SONG: See what a morning**

**Sharing of the peace**

**Communion**

**A prayer of confession**

**We are sorry, Lord, for the times when we stay in the tomb of our lack of belief and fill it with our fear.
Forgive us, and release us to be your witnesses in your world today.
We are sorry for the times we are sceptical when others share the power of the Resurrection in their lives.
Forgive us, and release us to be your witnesses in your world today.
We are sorry for the times when we live as if there were no Easter.
Forgive us, and release us to be your witnesses in your world today.**

Lord God, our hearts fill with joy today at the most wonderful news ever: Jesus is alive!

We thank you for all the signs of life that we see around us: sunshine, blossom on the trees, new life is blooming everywhere.

Lord Jesus, thank you that you went to the cross for us. Thank you that you love us so much that you willingly suffered all the pain and horror so that we might have a relationship with God. Thank you for love beyond measure.

Thank you, Lord, for the tremendous victory of the resurrection. Thank you for the hope, the joy, the fulfilment, the everlasting life that your rising brings.

Lord, we thank you for signs of resurrection in our own lives: perhaps something new learnt, a chance for rest and relaxation, a new job, a new member of the family, a recovery. There are so many ways that you bring new growth into our lives.

Lord Jesus, as the women came to the tomb in sorrow, their eyes full of tears, we are aware of so much sorrow still in our world. We lift to you now all the places where conflict exists – between nations, between factions, between families, between partners.

We bring to you our suffering planet: where the beauty you have created is being squeezed by humanity’s selfishness and greed.

We bring to you all those who are in pain: those we know and love who are sick, full of sorrow, loneliness or despair.

Lord, we deeply desire that your resurrected presence will fill those people and places of pain and redeem them, bringing the new life that is so dearly needed. Touch every heart with your eternal love, filling each seemingly hopeless situation with the promise of resurrected, everlasting hope.

Lord, the news of your rising was so amazing that even your closest friends struggled to believe it at first. We pray for all those we know who struggle to believe and trust in you. We ask you to help them ponder the evidence, just like Peter did, and to think seriously about what they see. Help us to show them, by our joy at your resurrection, that new life in Jesus is for everyone, for ever.

Now Lord come by your spirit. Take this bread and wine and make this a communion of your body and blood. Make this meal a communion with you and with each other. Nourish us and strengthen us in our faith that we may live and work for you and see your kingdom come.

After communion:

As we celebrate your victory, Lord, go before us this week into every situation we face. Give us new eyes to encounter your freshness and new life. Help us to remember that your resurrection is for ever, not just for one day. Thank you for being alive in us now. Breathe your Spirit into our hearts this week so that we may be faithful witnesses to all that you are and all that you have done.

Yours is the glory; risen, conquering Son.
**Endless is the victory over death you’ve won.**

Thank you, Lord Jesus.
**Amen.**

**Notices**

Coffee

Donation box for any gift you wish to make for the work of this church.

Communitea

In a few weeks’ time starting to look at the way of Jesus on alternate Wednesday evenings– looking at the Beatitudes – the 9 Beats – what does it mean to be a follower of Christ – how is his way different to the way of the world.

Information in our weekly email notices – which if you are not a subscriber to, and want to be, just send me an email and ask for them.

If you have read them this week you will see that we have an option of a church weekend away 1-3 July in Braeside near Devizes. Need to know interest by end of next week to see if the week is going to be viable.

**A sending out prayer**

Risen Lord,
you always go before us – preparing the way,
leading us further along your path of life.
Today of all days, there is no more fear.
alleluia Christ is risen

He is risen indeed. alleluia!

**Amen.**