

Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit

Worship at Home 11th April 2021

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Today we meet a week after the joy of Easter Day, of the Day of Resurrection, we meet with hope and with the assurance that Christ is alive and with us.

However, today is known as Low Sunday. Why is that? Well it could be as simple as a contrast to last Sunday with all its highs. But there is some truth in that, how often after an amazing event is over we can actually feel quite flat. The disciples were in that odd position, they weren't sure what had gone on, was he alive, and if he was, what did that mean? They were excited and anxious - a feeling that many of us can relate to as the journey out of lockdown continues. They needed the living breath of God to empower them.

We sing.....STF 391

O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,
Revive Your church with life and power.
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit Your church to meet this hour.

O Breath of love, come breathe within,
Renewing thought and will and heart;
Come, Love of Christ, afresh to win,
Revive Your church in every part.

O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in Your tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore, for this we plead.

O Breath of love, come breathe within,
Renewing thought and will and heart;
Come, Love of Christ, afresh to win,
Revive Your church in every part.

Please use these words as our opening prayer

Jesus, stand among us in thy risen power;
let this time of worship be a hallowed hour.

Breathe the Holy Spirit into every heart;
bid the fears and sorrows from each soul depart.

Thus with quickened footsteps we'll pursue our way,
watching for the dawning of eternal day.

'Bid the fears and sorrows from each soul depart' -
we will find in our reading today that the disciples
have fears, they have inner sorrows, and both are
keeping them locked up.

Let's put ourselves in the story, let's join them in
the room behind the locked door, we are not
expecting much to happen, but boy when it
does.....!!!!!!

John 20:19-31 Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Prayer of Adoration and Forgiveness

Father, Friend, Creator, Redeemer. I praise you.
Shepherd, King, Servant, Saviour. I am in awe of you.

Sometimes the door of my heart becomes stuck, the
hinges need oiling. Sometimes I don't want to open it,
in case you see what is inside.

Lord, I seek forgiveness. For those things which keep
us separated, those words, deeds and thoughts which
chain me. Lord help me to know that I do not have to
lock myself away, you want to restore, to bring life and
love, you want me to enjoy being in your company.

Father, Friend, Creator, Redeemer, I praise you.
Shepherd, King, Servant, Saviour, I am in awe of you.

Amen

Thankyou to John Hardwick – evangelist amongst
young people for giving permission to use his
song

For God so loved the world
He gave His only Son
And whoever believes in Him
Shall not die but have eternal life

L is for the love that He has for me
I am the reason He died on the tree
F is for forgiveness and now I am free
E is to enjoy being in His company

Sermon

Locked away - a situation not unknown to us
this past year - but it wasn't a virus that kept
them indoors, and I wonder if it really was fear
of the Jews? I mean once Jesus had been
dealt with, this rag tag group of disciples
weren't going to prove much of a threat were
they? Maybe it was fear of 'what next' if Jesus
really was alive, as some of the women had
said, and a couple of them had indeed checked
out an empty tomb - what would he say to them
about their denials, their sleeping in the
garden while he was praying, their deserting of
him when life got tough?

What would he say? Well you may have noticed
that he says absolutely nothing about any of
that. Instead he shows Grace and speaks
Peace. And they are overjoyed, a weight falls
from their shoulders. It's as though he has

completely forgotten. But that's what he does
with our mistakes and our failures, he doesn't
harbour them, only we do. Does hearing that
again, take a weight off your shoulders? In
this story there is **Forgiveness** without the
words being uttered. With hindsight we can
say that the forgiveness had already happened
on the cross, theirs, mine, yours. The **Love** he
has for each one is so immense, for them, for
me, for you.

As Christians we are often encouraged to veer
away from talking about too much about
ourselves, 'the I', for as Mr. Wesley would say,
there is no such thing as a solitary Christian.
Christian life is life in community, in the
fellowship of the Spirit that we call the
church. However, there is also the well known
saying, 'If **I** was the only person on the planet
he would have died for me'. It is true, **LOVE
FOR ME, FORGIVENESS FOR ME**. But why?
So that **I** could **ENJOY LIFE** - the life that
Christ has for me.

The life he gives is a life to be lived. A life
that the disciples (and us) are sent out to
live. A life that begins now, and has no end.

The first instruction Jesus gives, is to tell the
disciples that they too must forgive -
reminding them of what he has done for them.
Love/forgive like I do he says. But how would
they ever be able to do that, given their recent
track record. They couldn't even forgive
themselves. They definitely needed an
empowering from him.... But more of that in a
moment.

Hymn HP 158

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.

Breathe on me breath of God - I wonder if we have really thought about those words when we have sung them before. What would that look like, feel like. In this passage we see it happening! The very breath of God that recently breathed into Jesus and brought him back from death - resurrection breath - the very same breath that originally breathed into the dust of the earth and created Adam back in Genesis, that breath, that **LIFE**-creating breath - that was what was being breathed into these disciples. That's what would fill them, empower them as Jesus sent them out. That's how they could go out and continue Jesus's mission, that's how they would learn to forgive and even enjoy doing it.

Today as the doors of our houses are gradually being unlocked, as the hinges creakily turn, we too are being sent out to bring Resurrection **LIFE**. But we will need to take a deep breath. On our own we might well find ourselves denying, deserting or sleeping because sometimes they can be the much easier way. But Jesus asks us to join him in bringing Resurrection **LIFE** through **LOVE**, to care for the Individual just as he did, to show

forgiveness and to **enjoy** doing it, and why shouldn't we enjoy it for we will be doing it in his company, in the company of the holy Spirit, and together we will have, and we will bring **LIFE** in his name, and may we bring that to those he sends us to.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives.

Lord we do believe that however daunting tomorrow may be, however many twists and turns the future may hold,, that we can go forward into it, because you will be there.

We hear your words of Peace calming our fears, yet you already know that our fears will get the better of us from time to time and we will retreat behind the door.

The door of ill health, the door of financial concern. The door of relationship problems. Lord there are many doors of fear out there, we pray that you will open them.

When we hear the voices of self-doubt, telling us we are worthless, that we are weak and can do nothing and change is beyond our grasp:
God, who has made us in your image give us the power of your Spirit to learn and grow, and to work with you towards a new creation.

When the vulnerable are exploited, And the trust of the innocent betrayed. When the strong seem invincible And the weak have nowhere to turn:
God, who sides with the poor give us the power of your Spirit to resist evil and to work with you towards a new creation.

In a world crying out for peace, Where conflicts seem hardened into steel Where war and poverty uproot families and homes, And those seeking refuge are treated as criminals:
God, who made the world to be one, give us the power of your Spirit to struggle for justice, and to work with you towards a new creation.

In a church that can be afraid of difference,
And sets up barriers against the outside,
Where people are fearful of change,
Clinging to outworn ways:

**God, who calls us to be your people,
give us the power of your Spirit to witness for you,
and to work with you towards a new creation.
Amen**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

As our church buildings have remain closed, one of the usual practices we have not been able to do is to pass the plate around. However I know that there has been huge generosity over these last twelve months. As we ask God's blessing on what we will share with others this week, we lift up our immense gratitude for that which we have, that we can share. The reading from Acts set for today gives us an opportunity to ponder upon that

Acts 4:32-35 NIV **The Believers Share Their Possessions**

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

In the reading above we see **LIFE - Love** for the **Individual**, no doubt some **Forgiveness** there, and **Enjoyment**.

Our final hymn - STF 303

**I know that my Redeemer lives;
What joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head.**

**He lives to bless me with His love,
He lives to plead for me above.
He lives my hungry soul to feed,
He lives to help in time of need.**

**He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death:
He lives my future to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.**

**He lives, all glory to His Name!
He lives, my Saviour, still the same.
What joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!**

Closing Prayer

Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless his people. —Teresa of Avila, 1515-1582

Breathe in me, O Lord that I may do your will.

Rev Michelle Ireland

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