

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 creekily 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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