

Order of Service for Kingswood 18th April 2021 10am

Led by Rev. Stuart Bell

We are of course still in the Easter season. Easter was very strange we've perhaps even forgotten it because nothing immense happened. The children are back at school, but we are firmly in the Easter season. We shall be looking later in our service at one of the accounts in the Gospels of the risen Jesus appearing to the disciples and so our hymns today are on an Easter theme.

StF 295 Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord

Prayers of approach, confession & forgiveness.

Hail! Holy, holy, holy Lord
whom One in Three we know;
by all thy heavenly host adored,
by all thy Church below.

We join with Charles Wesley's words to praise your holy Name. We come with awe and adoration in our hearts.

Heavenly Father, creator of the universe, who holds the galaxies in balance, and who in your love gave us this planet to be our home, to give us life and sustenance'

We praise and adore your holy Name.

Loving Lord Jesus, who came to earth to show us how to live in community, who suffered death on the Cross and rose again with the promise of eternal life for all

We praise and adore your holy Name.

Gracious Holy Spirit, who guides us on our journey through life, and reminds us of the eternal presence of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

We praise and adore your holy Name.

In your almighty presence we are reminded of our own shortcomings. Too easily, we have put our own comfort first and forgotten the needs of others. We have acted selfishly, ignoring others who may have difficulties greater than ours. We have become impatient with the restrictions of our present way of life because of the pandemic, forgetting to trust in you for the outcome.

But we remember too that you are a God of mercy and compassion, who will forgive us if we are really sorry for our selfish actions and stubborn pride. And so we look for the renewal of our spirits and the promise of new life in this season of Easter.

And so we give wholehearted thanks, that the Lord is good, and looks kindly on his people. Thank you, Father, for the renewal of springtime, witnessed in the blossoms and increased activity in the natural world. Thank you, Jesus, for enabling us to follow you to the Cross and on to your wonderful resurrection on Easter morning. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your eternal presence, giving us support along our way, and showing us the path to salvation through Jesus.

With joy, thanksgiving and praise in our hearts we present these prayers. **Amen.**

Gospel reading. Luke 24 v36b - 48

StF 272. From heaven you came, helpless babe.

Stuart Bell. Address: "Jesus himself stood among them"

Our Bible passage is from Luke's Gospel, he tells the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples after the resurrection. They've just heard the story from those who had met him on the road to Emmaus. He's broken bread with them. At which point Luke tells us that their eyes were opened, and he vanished from their sight.

So those disciples go back to Jerusalem with this quite amazing news. And there Luke tells us, they told them what had happened on the road and how he made known to them in the breaking of bread. And then, that's where our passage takes over, as they were saying this, Jesus Himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened and suppose they saw a spirit.

And he said to them, "why are you troubled? Why the questions rising in your heart, see my hands and my feet, that is I myself handle me and see, for the spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see that I have. And then the following verse, He shows that by eating some boiled fish.

Jesus, again appears to the disciples.

The account stresses that Jesus was there. It wasn't just some apparition. It wasn't just some appearance.

He eats, he is not a ghost, he is not a trick of the light. He's not the hallucination of followers who desperately wanted to see Jesus again. He is there. You might wonder how we reconcile that with John telling us that Jesus told Mary, not to touch him in chapter 20 of John's Gospel. It's a very good question. There aren't any easy answers. Especially since a few verses in that same gospel later, Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds, to feel his side. One New Testament scholar has listed 12 different possible explanations for Jesus's instruction to Mary. I don't think any of them is really satisfactory. But perhaps it was telling Mary not to cling to him so much, that he could not ascend his Father, as must happen.

The clear evidence across the Gospels as here is that the resurrected body of Jesus was real. It wasn't an apparition, it wasn't a ghost, it wasn't an appearance. We can never know the underlying physiology, if that really has any meaning. But it wasn't just that Jesus appeared to them. He actually was there and that's at the heart of the Christian faith.

If I said to you, Bishop of Durham, I wonder whom you think of you might you might think of the current Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler, because before he was in Durham, he was the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham. And before that, incidentally, when I was down in Southampton, he was the Bishop of Southampton. So we kind of walked together up the country. But I suspect when you hear the words Bishop of Durham, some of you at least will think of David Jenkins, and it may come as a shock to you to find that he was installed as Bishop of Durham in 1984 37 years ago, the year that I went into college, But he attracted attention I think like no other Bishop has done since, although Bishop N. T. Wright was very popular as a great New Testament scholar who made his understanding accessible to lots of people. But David Jenkins, started a job he wasn't even in post then, as a controversialist because of things that he was said to have said in a TV debate about the resurrection in 1984.

He was accused of saying he didn't really believe in it. He was accused of saying it was a conjuring trick with bones. But his whole point was that it wasn't just a conjuring trick with bones. We say yes, Jesus was there, it

wasn't an apparition, but it was far far more than simply Jesus his body somehow, amazingly, miraculously, being there in front of the disciples.

What David Jenkins actually said was it was NOT a conjuring trick with bones, because it was far more than that. During the lockdown, I've been looking at his kind of pseudo autobiography, in which he says:-

“In the interview I made it quite clear that the resurrection was not a single miracle. Faith in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus was kindled, then confirmed by a series of events such as the empty tomb story, there was a series of encounters, as recounted in the last pages of the four gospels. The cumulative effect of which was to convince the disciples on their companions, who were seeing Jesus dead and knew that he was buried, that was not the end of him. Through the power and presence of God, Jesus was alive in the sphere and realm of God in the unique way appropriate to God. To believe in the resurrection is therefore to share in the conviction of the first apostles, and their companions, a conviction about the reality and the world changing power of this man, in and through the power, and the presence of God.”

That's not someone who doesn't believe in the resurrection, that someone who says it's far more than simply a conjuring trick with bones, and that's the resurrection that's at the heart of our faith.

And then in the passage, we have the foundation for later statements about the way in which Christ fulfilled the prophecy in the imperative to proclaim the Good News. He said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of the Prophets, and the Psalms MUST be fulfilled.” Then he opens the scripture to them, which shows that Christ MUST suffer, and on the third day, the MUST, the MUST, the MUST of Jesus following the path that his Father had set for him, through Calvary to resurrection.

That was what he had to do. Those ‘musts’, that divine imperative, makes it really silly to discuss who, for example, was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus,

He MUST do it.

We live in a culture in which stresses the individual choice and free will, in which suffering is to be avoided at all costs. That's why the commitment of the Covenant Service 'put me to what you will' is so countercultural, and is so counter instinctive. But it's not just that our faith in Jesus demands it, our faith is in the one who buys a willingness to walk the way of the cross exemplified acceptance of it, to a far greater extent than for most of us.

Do we ever have that compulsive sense that we must do something which is entirely prejudicial to our own well being and interests?

Can we see God at work when that happens? How do we explain that sense to others around us?

That sense of doing something not for ourselves, but for others that 'MUST' is a key part of our Christian discipleship.

And then finally, in this passage after the end, just after the appointed reading, Luke sets the scene for Pentecost with Jesus's promise of the Spirit. 'Stay here in the city' He says, 'until you have been clothed with power from on high'.

Next, Jesus will ascend to heaven. Those things he must do, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, will be completed.

But we'll have to wait three more weeks before we celebrate them.

Prayers for others.

Loving God, You stand among us today and call us to be people of faith, yet often our heads and hearts are full of questions.

We wonder if love can grow again in relationships where anger and bitterness prevail, but you know the strength of love and the power of prayer.

We wonder if peace can come in many countries in our world where there is fighting, war and abuse or where hatred and racism know no boundaries.

You know that peace is possible - help us to be faithful peacemakers.

We wonder if refugees can ever be treated with welcome and respect in our own country and if the hungry can be fed in countries that are experiencing drought,

war and poverty and where your children continue to perish.
You know that there is room and enough food for everyone in the world; help us to be welcoming, generous and faithful.

We wonder if governments throughout the world can lead their people with justice and fairness. You specialize in impossibilities; you walked on water, you can heal the nations, you forgive sins, you set people free from all that limits them, you set each one of us free from our sin and shame by your death, your glorious resurrection and the gift of your Holy Spirit.

Today we pray for all people who are filled with uncertainty, who wonder whether you exist and whether you are listening to our prayers, who wonder what the Christian community and faith are about.

We pray for people who struggle with the meaning of life, who wonder whether to end it all, who face feelings of hopelessness and despair particularly those who have lost jobs, income and homes as a result of the pandemic.

Even when we ourselves are struggling, give us the wisdom to turn to you. Jesus, when our faith is weak or in danger of deserting us, strengthen us and give us hope. We ask for good news for people in our community and throughout the world, people who are sick, or who are grieving, we pray especially for the Queen and her family at this time as they mourn the death of her husband Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh but also for others known to us personally at this time.

Finally we pray for all people who need your help in practical ways - empower us to be your hands and feet and to show your love by our action where it is needed. Give us faith, small as a mustard seed, so that we may move mountains, so that we may bring change. May we share your hope, your love, your peace and your justice with this needy world. We ask all these things in the name of you dear son Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

StF 347 Crown him with many crowns

Blessing.

May the blessing of God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, be upon us. Be upon those we love, and those who we ought to love. Now and forever. **Amen**