

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 11 April 2021 – 2nd Sunday of Easter

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett, with a reflection by Jane Williams and can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley churches for the 2nd Sunday of Easter.

Behold how good and pleasant it is to dwell together in unity. It is like the dew of Hermon running down upon the hills of Zion. For there the Lord has promised his blessing: even life for evermore.
Psalm 133: 1,4,5

Invitation to Confession

Christ died to sin once for all, and now he lives to God. Let us renew our resolve to have done with all that is evil and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Prayers of Penitence

Lord Jesus, you raise us to new life.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you feed us with the living bread.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you forgive us our sins.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by his Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Collect

Risen Christ, for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred: open the doors of our hearts, that we may seek the good of others and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace, to the praise of God the Father.
Amen.

First Reading

Acts 4: 32 – 35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Gospel Reading

John 20: 19 – end

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told

him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection by Jane Williams

"My head is in a spin, the events of the last couple of weeks have turned my life upside down. Jesus is dead! I still can't quite believe it. I loved Jesus. I would have followed him to the ends of the earth. I was even prepared to follow him to death. When he was determined to go to Jerusalem even though he seemed certain that his friend Lazarus had died, the others were trying to talk him out of it, scared that he would be killed, but I knew that if this was what Jesus wanted then we should go with him, even if it meant that we would die with him. I was prepared for that, ready for it even. Jesus caused something to burn within me, that sense of rightness, that sense that he was the one we had to follow, the one we had to believe in. So we went, and Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It was the most incredible thing ever. We went with him to the tomb. He told us to take away the stone, we looked at each other incredulously. Didn't Jesus know that Lazarus had been dead for four days? Didn't he know that the stench would be unbearable? But we were his disciples, we had learnt to do what he told us, so, holding our breath we rolled the stone away. Jesus then prayed to his Father and thanked him for hearing him and then he called "Lazarus, come out". And he did. He was wrapped in grave clothes and Jesus told us to take them off him, and when we did, there was Lazarus, he was alive, he could walk and talk, he was the same as he had always been. It was the most incredible thing I had ever seen, and I was truly humbled that Jesus had allowed us to be part of it.

But soon afterwards the mood changed. Jesus kept talking about his death. He had done so before, but now after what had happened to Lazarus it just didn't make sense. Surely this was the Son of God! Not only had we seen him perform miracles, giving sight to the blind, making the lame walk again, now he had raised someone from the dead, so how could he possibly die?

But he did. We watched him. It was a slow painful agonising death on a cross, like a criminal. Even in the midst of his pain though, he was concerned for others. I heard him tell his Mother Mary, that the disciple whom Jesus loved was now her son and she his mother. Eventually he said, 'It is finished', and then he died. I felt as if I had died as well. What would I do now? This was the person I had focussed my life on, the person I was willing to die for. What purpose did my life have now?

As if that wasn't enough, three days later some of the women started saying that he had risen from the dead. How could that be? We had seen him die. Yes, I know he had raised Lazarus from the dead, so I guess it was possible, but then we had all been there, we had all seen it, why would he have just appeared to some of the women. Surely if it was true, he would have appeared to all of us so that we could have shouted it from the rooftops? It's all just too confusing for me. I so want to believe it but I can't. I guess I would need to see it with my own eyes, like I did with Lazarus.

Life after Jesus died has not been great. The Jews, our own people, have been persecuting us. It has not been safe for any of us. When we have met it has had to be behind locked doors. And now the other disciples, my so-called friends, are trying to tell me that as well as Jesus appearing to some of the women, he has appeared to them as well, behind locked doors. Do they think I'm stupid? Only a ghost could do that, and I will not believe that Jesus has become a ghost. Yes, I know Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but he was a real live human being, he could no more have walked through locked doors than I could. And in any case, why would he have appeared to all of them and not me? They were adamant though; it really was Jesus. Apparently, he said, 'Peace be with you' and he showed them his hands and side. They can't fool me though, so I 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 it". That would prove it once and for all, I wouldn't be able to do that if he was a ghost would I?

Ok, perhaps there was a tinge of Jealousy. If it really was Jesus, why hadn't I seen him as well? Was there something wrong with me? Had I somehow let him down? But no, of course not, it couldn't be true, could it?

Several days passed, the others were careful not to say anything around me, they knew I didn't believe them, but from time to time I would catch them whispering to each other and then stopping when they saw me. I began to feel really uncomfortable, like I was missing out on something. I could feel the others withdrawing from me, like they all shared some great big secret that I didn't know about. And then we were all together in the locked room and suddenly Jesus was there. I nearly fainted, so they had seen something after all, it really must be Jesus' ghost. Why was this happening, what did it mean? Jesus said those words again, 'Peace be with you', and do you know what? It was really strange, but I felt that peace come over me. He then said, and it was as if he could read my mind;

"Put your fingers here, see my hands. Reach out and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe". But I didn't need to, this really was Jesus, not some ghost and so I fell on my knees and said, "My Lord and my God". Then Jesus said;

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed". Yes, I suppose you could say it was a rebuke, a telling off and yes I should have been able to believe without seeing it with my own eyes, but you know what? It didn't really feel like a telling off, it felt as if Jesus knew me so well that he knew just what I needed. He knew that I had to experience his presence for myself, to know that he really wasn't a ghost. And, of course, once it happened, the pieces of the jigsaw all started to fit together. He had said he would rise again; he had told the Jews that if they tore down the temple then 3 days later it would be restored. None of us knew what it meant at the time, but we do now. As for me, I now have that sense of purpose I was missing before. I now have to tell everyone about Jesus, not just the man who we followed around the country, not just the man who was crucified on the cross, but the man who rose again from the dead, not in the same way as Lazarus did, because he was different, and now he tells us he is going back to his Father, but that is ok, because now we know who he is, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah, and I for one will follow him and tell the good news all of my days."

Prayers

Jesus, light of the world, bring the light and peace of your gospel to all people.
Jesus, Lord of Life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, bread of life, give food to the hungry and nourish us all with your word.
Jesus, Lord of Life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, our way, our truth, our life,
Be with us and all who follow you in the way.
Deepen our love and understanding of your truth and fill us with your life.
Jesus, Lord of Life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep, recover the straggler, bind up the injured, strengthen the sick and lead the healthy to new pastures.
Jesus, Lord of Life, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Jesus, the resurrection and the life, we give you thanks for all those who have lived and believed in you. Raise us with them to eternal life.
Jesus, Lord of Life, **in your mercy hear us, accept our prayers and be with us always. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
**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 those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen**

The Blessing

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

The Peace

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, 'Peace be with you'. Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.
The peace of the risen Lord be always with you
and also with you.

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