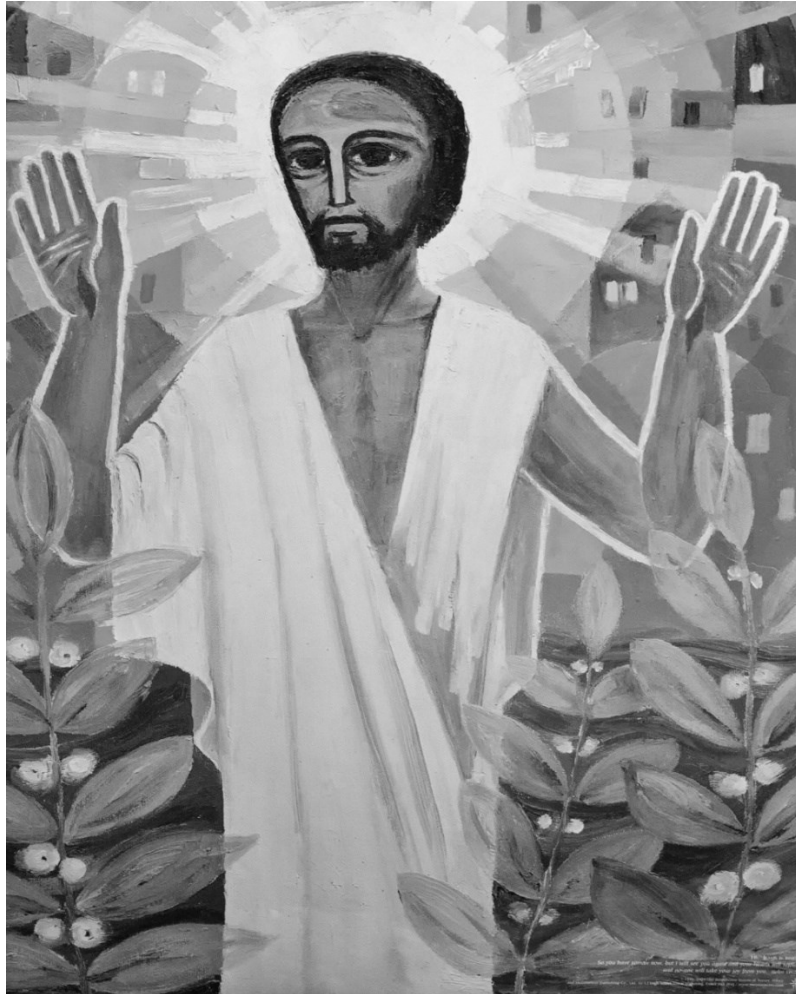


Sunday, 18 April 2021
The Third Sunday of Easter

**Please use this material with
the Easter order of Service**



Collects

Almighty Father,
who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples
with the sight of the risen Lord:
give us such knowledge of his presence with us,
that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life
and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

or

Sunday, 18 April 2021
The Third Sunday of Easter

Risen Christ,
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life
and fill us with your peace,
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

Readings

Acts 3: 12-19

When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, ‘You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

‘And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.

Luke 24: 36b-48

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you

Sunday, 18 April 2021
The Third Sunday of Easter

anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Sermon

‘They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence’. (Luke 24: 42)

One thing is for certain that for the first Christians the resurrection was a reality. But in what way? What kind of reality was it – indeed what kind of reality *is* it? The glorious aspect of the resurrection is that it is multi-faceted like a beautifully cut diamond, each face reflects light in a different way. That’s why when Luke writes of the disciples – that when the risen Jesus had shown them his hands and feet, ‘in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering’ (Luke 24:41). It sounds like a contradiction to say the disciples experienced the joy of resurrection and yet they were also disbelieving.

This is where the broiled fish plays its part. The point is that for some people reality is not abstract but concrete, physical and specific. The Hebrew mind likes concrete ideas – just dip into any of the Psalms and you’ll see this: ‘The Lord is my shepherd’ (Ps 23:1); ‘the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous (Ps 34:15): ‘When shall I come to behold the face of God?’ (Ps 42:2). For most of us reality is shopping at the Co-Op on the High Street, feeding the ducks on the Granta, watching children play on the rec ground, catching the bus into Cambridge.

Sunday, 18 April 2021

The Third Sunday of Easter

And yet we also know or sense that there are deeper more fundamental realities. The ancient Greek philosophers thought of reality in this more abstract way. They did not think in the Hebrew concrete way but in mathematical terms using the insights of geometry to ponder on the intricate workings of the universe. From 4th century BC Democritus to the 21st century particle physicists, the aim has been the same: namely to reveal the extraordinary nature of the reality of matter which constantly eludes and amazes us. Einstein speaks for many scientists when he said:

The scientist is activated by a wonder and awe before the mysterious comprehensibility of the universe which is yet finally beyond his grasp. In its profoundest depths it is inaccessible to man.

Thus, the apparent contradiction of the disciples that 'in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering' is not so contradictory after all. I don't know whether you have ever listened to the 'Infinite Monkey Cage' on BBC Radio 4 but if you have you will know that it takes a light-hearted approach to some serious ideas. Last week the programme was on the 'Fundamentals of Reality' - you can find it on the internet and I recommend it to you (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000s1sh). At one point the comedian Sara Pascoe and Nobel Prize physicist Frank Wilczek find themselves in surprising agreement. Sara says that for her reality is her emotional everyday sense of self which she knows is different from her dream-world, where the narrative of herself is confused and erratic. Professor Wilczek agrees – science is also a narrative, a narrative which is not in competition with our everyday experiences, but which also aims to offer a detailed explanation of matter from a very different perspective. For both Frank and Sara both narratives reinforce the very fact that not only is there existence but that it is wonderful and extraordinary.

So, for some of the disciples the experience of seeing Jesus' hands and feet or eating broiled fish is enough to change their narrative view of reality, but for others they needed a different kind of narrative. For them the resurrection has to be understood in a more abstract

Sunday, 18 April 2021
The Third Sunday of Easter

narrative way by viewing it as part of the story of Israel: from Moses, through the prophets and the poetry of the psalms and concluding with Jesus' death. It is only then when resurrection is seen as being part of a much grander historical context that for these disciples their minds were opened, and they grasped the meaning and reality of the resurrection.

There is no one way of understanding the reality which the resurrection reveals. Like our multifaceted diamond, each writer of the New Testament sees in it something different: whether it is the concrete reality that there is life after death, or the experience of the reality of God's transforming love or overcoming sin with the reality of a new life in Christ, each facet, each narrative points to the deep mystery of our spiritual existence, which as Einstein rightly concluded, 'is yet finally beyond our grasp'.

Michael Wilcockson

Thine be the glory

1 Thine be the glory,
risen, conqu'ring Son,
endless is the vict'ry
thou o'er death hast won;
angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes
where thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory,
risen conqu'ring Son,
endless is the vict'ry
thou o'er death hast won.*

Sunday, 18 April 2021
The Third Sunday of Easter

2 Lo! Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom.
Let the Church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth;
death hath lost its sting.

Chorus

3 No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of Life;
life is naught without Thee:
aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conqu'rors,
through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above.

Chorus

CCLI Song # 21837

Edmond Louis Budry | George Frideric Handel | Richard Birch Hoyle

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Now the green blade riseth

1 Now the green blade riseth
from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth
many days has lain;
Love lives again,
that with the dead has been;
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

Sunday, 18 April 2021
The Third Sunday of Easter

2 In the grave they laid him,
Love by hatred slain,
thinking that never
he would wake again,
laid in the earth
like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

3 Forth he came at Easter,
like the risen grain,
he that for three days
in the grave had lain;
quick from the dead,
my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

4 When our hearts are wintry,
grieving or in pain,
thy touch can call us
back to life again;
fields of our hearts,
that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

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Love's redeeming work is done

1 Love's redeeming work is done;
fought the fight, the battle won:
lo, our Sun's eclipse is o'er,
lo, he sets in blood no more.

Sunday, 18 April 2021

The Third Sunday of Easter

2 Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
death in vain forbids his rise;
Christ has opened paradise.

3 Lives again our glorious King;
where, O death, is now thy sting?
Dying once, he all doth save;
where thy victory, O grave?

4 Soar we now where Christ has led,
foll'wing our exalted Head;
made like him, like him we rise;
ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

5 Hail the Lord of earth and heav'n!
praise to thee by both be giv'n;
thee we greet triumphant now;
hail, the Resurrection thou!

CCLI Song # 5697355
Alex Mejias | Charles Wesley
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Closing Prayer

Living God,
your Son made himself known to his disciples
in the breaking of bread:
open the eyes of our faith,
that we may see him in all his redeeming work;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Amen.