

Home Worship for The Fourth Sunday of Easter

3rd May 2020 - "Life out of Death" - Revd Blair Kirkby

As you commence this service, sit quietly, and let all the thoughts of the day drift away, so you feel able to focus on the service with the many people around HAEBEA will be also reading it today.

Call to Worship

This is the good news which we proclaim to you.

Jesus Christ is raised from the dead!

Walk in the light of his love.

Live in the light of his teachings and healing mercies.

Come, let us worship the One Who overcame death.

Let us celebrate the triumph of our Lord. Amen.



*Unless the grain of wheat dies
it remains just a grain of wheat*

Scripture Reading: John 12:24

"Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Meditation

One of the most moving stories I ever read came from the twentieth century theologian Paul Tillich. In one of his many books Tillich tells of how, during the Nuremburg war-crimes trials, a witness described how he had lived for a time in a grave in a Jewish cemetery in Poland. This, he said, was the only place in which he and many others could hide after they had escaped the gas chambers.

The witness then told how, in a grave nearby, a young woman gave birth to a boy, and was assisted in the delivery by an eighty-year-old gravedigger, wrapped in a linen shroud. When the new-born child uttered its first cry, the old man wept out loud and then gave thanks to God for such a birth in in the midst of such death.

Death is almost always hard. Of all our visitors to our homes, it is the one that is most unwelcome. However, situations of death can also be the ones when we most sense the presence of God. There, amongst the debris of a life lost, we may feel the enduring presence of a grace which abides and a love that sustains. Said Samuel Miller, "We never see Him directly, but He is always with us, experienced sometimes through the very things that seem to deny Him."

Of course, God is also experienced in happy times, but it is our experience of Him in "the things that seem to deny to Him" that really astonishes us. So it was with the death of Jesus. His death on the cross was, for many of His followers, a very bitter pill to swallow. Although he had told them it was coming, it nonetheless was not what they had expected. From the gospel accounts, it seems that what they had expected and hoped for was Christ's earthly success and a generous share of it for themselves. Some of them had hoped that he would redeem Israel, kick out the Romans, and establish an everlasting Davidic kingdom within that country. They did not expect Him to be crucified like a common criminal, while Rome still lorded it over them. Yet, out of His death there came something greater.

The love that was in Him now seemed bigger and more far reaching. The Word, that He had embodied, kept getting up to walk and talk again in ways that stretched the borders of their minds. He was mediated to them by the very thing that seemed to deny Him. In a sense, we may even say that he was born in a grave because it was in the light of His death that they saw the true scope of His life.

During this death dealing virus then, we take hope. As we stay indoors, and listen to the daily reports, and face up to “the things that seem to deny Him,” we find that Jesus is very much with us. He is not dead. He does not sleep. He is not sick, or debilitated, or “gone missing”. He is with us, and in us, and for us. Who knows what can be born from a cemetery in Poland, or a cross at Golgotha, or the carnage of covid 19? When the love of God is present, we dare not say that anything is impossible.

Hymn “Now the green blade rises” sung by the Ely Cathedral Choir.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27p98aLPZPI>

Watch the video if you can or find the words in your hymn book and read or sing them yourself.

A Prayer

Loving and holy God, For all that is good in life, thank you,
For the love of family and friends, thank you,
For the kindness of good neighbour and Samaritan stranger, thank you.

May those who are vulnerable, hungry or homeless, experience support,
May those who are sick, know healing,
May those who are anxious or bereaved, sense comfort.

Bless and guide political leaders and decision-makers, with wisdom,
Bless and guide health workers and key workers, with strength and well-being,
Bless and guide each one of us, as we adapt to a new way of living.

Help us to see your presence in good times and bad,
to give thanks for your light in the midst of life and death.

Help us to believe that you can, and do bring life out of death,
for you are the one who brought Christ out of the tomb.

And may the light shining from you,
across road and wynd*, glen and ben, kyle and isle,
be reflected in our hearts, hands, and hopes.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

A **wynd is typically a narrow lane between houses. The name is frequently encountered in towns and villages in Scotland and Northern England.*

Blessing

Bless us O God, for we are ever in need of your blessings.

Bless us with faith, hope, and love.

Bless us with health, strength and understanding.

Bless us with grace, resilience and laughter.

And when lights grow dim and darkness draws in,
bless us with peace of mind.

For we ask it in Christ’s name, Amen.

