

NNE Written Service

Easter Sunday

Sunday 31st March 2024

Service written by Marc Williamson

Nottingham North East
Methodist Circuit
WWW.NNEMETHODIST.ORG.UK



Charity number 1134226

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our Creator God, through the risen Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us, is here as we worship. May we recognise that presence and come humbly to hear what they would have us hear. As we draw our focus to this moment of worship, seeking to recognise the beauty and majesty of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we remind ourselves of what we believe and who we worship with the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

AMEN

Hymn:

Let's remind ourselves of the journey we've been on this Holy Week with our opening song. In it we declare the dual identity of Jesus who is one with the heart of God, yet of humble human flesh, displaying the divine intention for humanity in all of his meekness and majesty:

Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony — the man who is God.
Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility and washes our feet.

*Oh, what a mystery — meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship, for this is your God, this is your God!*

Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence,
yet learns obedience to death on a cross:
suffering to give us life, conquering through sacrifice --
and as they crucify, prays, 'Father forgive.'

Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible,
love indestructible in frailty appears:
Lord of infinity, stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity to the heights of his throne.

STF 362 - Graham Kendrick

Let us Pray:

God, creator, artist supreme,
The potter who forms us,
The father who keeps us,
The mother who holds us,
The word who sustains us,
The love who will not let us go,
We offer you our sacrifice of praise.

Jesus, Messiah, Saviour and friend,
The rabbi who teaches us,
The prophet who stirs us,
The healer who touches us,
The One who dies for us,
The love who will not let us go,
We offer you our sacrifice of praise.

Spirit, power, Breath of Life,
The guide who prompts us,
The truth who inspires us,
The fire who empowers us,
The spirit who enables us,
The love who will not let us go,
We offer you our sacrifice of praise.

Reading: Philippians 2:1-13 (“The Voice” translation)

If you find any comfort from being in the Anointed, if His love brings you some encouragement, if you experience true companionship with the Spirit, if His tenderness and mercy fill your heart; then, brothers and sisters, here is one thing that would complete my joy—come together as one in mind and spirit and purpose, sharing in the same love. Don’t let selfishness and prideful agendas take over. Embrace true humility, and lift your heads to extend love to others. Get beyond yourselves and protecting your own interests; be sincere, and secure your neighbours’ interests first. In other words, adopt the mind-set of Jesus the Anointed. Live with His attitude in your hearts. Remember:

Though He was in the form of God,
He chose not to cling to equality with God;
But He poured Himself out to fill a vessel brand new;
a servant in form and a man indeed.
The very likeness of humanity, He humbled Himself,
obedient to death— a merciless death on the cross!

So God raised Him up to the highest place
and gave Him the name above all.

So when His name is called, every knee will bow,
in heaven, on earth, and below.

And every tongue will confess
“Jesus, the Anointed One, is Lord,”
to the glory of God our Father!

{Paul describes a community where every person considers the needs of others first and does nothing from selfishness; it pulls together rather than pulls apart, and it is a body that knows its purpose and lets nothing interfere with it. It is an extended spiritual family where others line up to become part of this sacred assembly and to make it their home because they feel encouragement and know they are truly loved. So Paul urges the Philippians to strive for this radical unity and fulfil his joy by having the mind of Jesus who humbled

*Himself, became a servant, and suffered the death of the cross. Jesus becomes the example of humility and service, leading to the kind of unity Paul imagines.}*¹

So now, my beloved, obey as you have always done, not only when I am with you, but even more so when I can't be. Continue to work out your salvation, with great fear and trembling, because God is energising you so that you will desire and do what always pleases Him.

Hymn:

Recognising that resurrection moment and the new life Jesus brings in conquering death, we celebrate the fulfilment of God's salvation plan singing "for He lives: Christ is risen from the dead!"

See what a morning, gloriously bright,
with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
folded the grave-clothes, tomb filled with light,
as the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan, wrought in love,
borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
fulfilled in Christ, the Man,
for he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping, 'Where is he laid?'
as in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;
hears a voice speaking, calling her name;
it's the Master, the Lord, raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years, speaking life,
stirring hope, bringing peace to us,
will sound till he appears,
for he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty;
honour and blessing, glory and praise
to the King crowned with power and authority!
And we are raised with him, death is dead,
love has won, Christ has conquered;
and we shall reign with him,
for he lives: Christ is risen from the dead!

STF 309 - Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

¹ Text included within the passage in "The Voice" translation

Jesus Wasn't Meatloaf:

Alex Horne is the "Taskmaster's Assistant" on the Channel Four celebrity game show "Taskmaster." In it celebrities (normally comedians) are set completely random tasks to complete and are encouraged to think out of the box to do so. Not only is he the assistant, but he is the creator of the tasks and the show in the background. He has a really brilliant and off-the-wall way of thinking and seeing the world that I like. Another outlet he has for this is his comedy band "The Horne Section."

With the exception of Alex himself the band are all professional musicians who excel at their instruments. Alex is the lead singer, and his singing is questionable at best. But they write some hilarious songs and make observations of popular music too. One series of observations revolves around what they call "Caveat Songs."

Caveat Songs are songs where the lyrics contain clauses in them. Here are some examples:

Tina Turner's "The Best": "You're simply the best, Better than all the rest, Better than anyone, **anyone I've ever met...**" - the clause being there may be people better, I just haven't met them yet!

or Coolio's lyrics: "I'll see you when you get there... **IF** you ever get there" - If...

or Flight of the Conchords' line: "Looking round the room I can tell that you are the most beautiful girl, **in the room**. And when you're on the street, **depending on the street**, I bet you are definitely in the top three good looking girls on the street... **depending on the street**." - flattery!?

But the most famous of all has to be Meatloaf: "I would do ANYTHING for love, **BUT** I won't do *that*." - That's a BIG "But"... and I wonder what the "that" is!?

That's a lot of intro for us to begin to find a point. Perhaps you're trying to spot the reference to Easter in all of that... But there isn't one. There are a couple of points I want to make though:

1. The preamble is important... As long as it isn't subject to a clause (!);
2. Jesus wasn't Meatloaf.

We're at Easter weekend, recognising the culmination of events that leads to the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Jesus. We've journeyed with Jesus through Palm Sunday and Holy Week. We've recognised that he's taught the crowds and his disciples about the Kingdom of God and what it is to be a servant.

We've witnessed the trial with the rigged jury, heard the cries of "Crucify Him!" and we've wept with Mary at the cross. This morning we've perhaps also wept with Mary at the tomb, still in the throes of morning when struck with the confusion at the loss of the body of Jesus, before hearing the risen Jesus call us by name to proclaim the Gospel and the good news of the resurrection. But all of that cannot stand in isolation. That one week in Jesus' ministry comes with a pre-ambule. It is the climax that he has built up to throughout his ministry and we need to keep it as part of the bigger picture. And this is where point 2 comes into play. Jesus wasn't Meatloaf.

Jesus' whole existence was about the preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Not just something that is impending, but rather something that has always been there in the potential of humanity when they are in tune with the heart of God, when there is love for God, neighbour and self. Jesus is the incarnate expression of God saying "I would do ANYTHING for love":

I would spend time with those on the margins, those you deem as "sinful," "unclean," and "other";

I would elevate the cause and bring dignity to those deemed to be "lesser" - women, the aged, the infirm, children, the widow and the orphan, the foreigner...;

I would give my voice, my time, my ear, my attention, my hand, my grace, my joy, my hope, my peace, my love, to ALL those who bear the image of God;

I would feed the hungry, visit the lonely, console the grieving, heal the sick, and even bring people back to life;

I would speak truth to power, confronting injustice head-on, challenging societal wrongs, upsetting the religious imbalances, in order for all people to be treated with dignity and know their worth...

It's a list of things we're familiar with. And it's a list that goes on because even with the threat of death Jesus still doesn't find a "*that*" which he is unwilling to do.

These aren't just words and actions of a man who is content with life that will stop if it costs him more. These aren't empty thoughts and ideas with little conviction. These are the life-changing and world-defining actions of a man who carried them out unto threat and death.

How little weight would those actions carry if he weren't willing to die for them? How much value would we be able to place in the love of God for those of us who have accepted that we have failed to live up to the image and heart of God that was bestowed upon us at creation? How empty would the promise of forgiveness from the guilt and shame of that failure be without the final breath of Jesus?

There is no caveat. There is no clause. There is no rescinding of words or actions to appease those who would take his life. There is an unwavering commitment to seeing the Kingdom of God revealed in creation even unto death.

And as if that wasn't enough that death is only a breath. It's a pause. It's a moment of darkness that makes the light of the resurrection even brighter. The resurrection on the third day cries out that even when it seems like the life is crushed from the Kingdom of God, there will ALWAYS be another breath. There will ALWAYS be another chance at life. Just as the Kingdom of God is not stopped by death, but furthered by the resurrection, so too will we not be stopped by sin. There will ALWAYS be another opportunity for us to be released from guilt and shame, reborn in light and life, joy and hope, as bringers of peace and revealers of the Kingdom to the world.

May this Easter season be a reminder for us that Jesus had no caveats or clauses, not even unto threat of death. May we remember that even death was not enough of a clause to stop the outpouring of God's love upon us all. His forgiveness, grace and offer of life is for all, and for all time. He gave and did EVERYTHING for love, to show love to EVERYONE.

The challenge (and sermon for another time) becomes whether I too am living without the caveats and clauses, or whether there are still limits to my love...

AMEN

Hymn:

It is only by recognising God in the death and resurrection that we, disciples of the risen Jesus, are able to find a fulness of life: Here in the love of Christ I stand!

In Christ alone my hope is found,
he is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!

My Comforter, my All in All, here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! -- who took on flesh,
fulness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save:
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied
for every sin on him was laid; here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground his body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain:
then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am his and he is mine — bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

STF 351 - Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

In our services we often recite together the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer was given by Jesus to his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray. It speaks of praise and adoration; of seeking and claiming forgiveness whilst aspiring to forgive others; of the needs of ourselves and those around us for the Kingdom to be seen and known; and for the strength we need to face what may lay ahead.

I don't think Jesus meant it as a "Catch-all" prayer as much as a model for us to use to focus our attention on the heart of God and direct our thinking.

The following seeks to reframe those familiar words in a way that commit us to acknowledging and following Jesus as God incarnate. As you read it slowly, I wonder where you might expand each line by adding your thoughts and concerns for those you see in our world who need to know the love for which Jesus died.

Let us Pray:

Jesus, our Saviour, eternally risen, Honoured be your name,

The revelation of God's Kingdom come,

And Heaven's will be done, In us, as it was in You.

We need your ongoing provision each day.

We claim the forgiveness of sins that you offer us through the cross,

And in the same way seek to forgive those who trespass against us.

May we follow you in the Kingdom footsteps, not straying from your way of love.

For in you we recognise the Kingdom, The power and the glory,

Then, Now, and forever,

AMEN

Hymn:

Is it even Easter Sunday if we haven't considered the words of our closing hymn!?
"Let the Church with gladness hymns of triumph sing, for her lord now liveth, death
hath lost its sting!"

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory 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, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won!*

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:

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life;
life is naught without thee: aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above:

STF 313 - Edmond Budry

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Blessing:

May God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen us
to walk with him in his risen life;

May we too bring life anew to those we meet, bringing unconditional love, life and
liberation to all;

In the name of the Creator, following the example of the Son, and in the power of
the Holy Spirit,

AMEN