

Service on Enfield Methodist Circuit Website led by the Revd Valentin Dedji
Sunday after Easter: 19th April 2020

Welcome & Invocation

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, wherever you are, in the UK or overseas, in the comfort of your homes, in a nursing home or in a hospital, I welcome you in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Hymn (StF) 335 'Rejoice the Lord is King'
Rejoice, the Lord is King! your Lord and King adore;
mortals give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Jesus, the Saviour, reigns, the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains he took his seat above;

His kingdom cannot fail, he rules both earth and heaven,
the keys of death and hell are to our Jesus given;

He sits at God's right hand till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command, and fall beneath his feet:

Rejoice in glorious hope! Jesus the Judge shall come,
and take his servants up to their eternal home.
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
God's trumpet call shall sound, rejoice!

Opening prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the precious gift of a new day and of a new opportunity to start afresh with you. We are grateful that, of your own free goodness and mercy you have created us, and through the resurrection of your only-begotten Son, You have given us a new hope. Guard us by your love and, in your wisdom, keep us in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

Confession of sins

Almighty God, we confess that, for too long, many of us have wandered away from you, ignoring your divine instructions for our life. We have been behaving and living according to our ways, instead of following your ways. We pray that, through the life-changing power behind the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we may have the humility and the boldness to acknowledge that we have got it wrong. And may the Power of Jesus-Christ's love and His forgiveness bring us back to you as your friends and partners in your Mission wherever you have placed us. Thank you for your amazing Grace. Alleluiah. Amen!

Gospel reading John 20: 19-23 (NRSV)

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

On this Sunday after Easter, I would like to share briefly with you on the theme: '**Living as Easter People**'.

In our reading in John 20: 19-23, we see that the situation in Jerusalem in the aftermaths of the crucifixion of Jesus was profoundly unbearable for a number of His remaining disciples. So, they decided to lock themselves behind doors '**for fear of the Jews**'. The key word here that would help us to understand their state of mind here: is **FEAR**. Martin Luther King Jnr, once said: 'Fear and hatred paralyse life while Peace and Love release life'. In the short narrative according to John, there are some dramatic and significant details which I would like to comment on briefly:

1)- **The locked doors**: That is the symbol of a situation of crisis, blockage, loss of hope, retreating from the enemy ... Today, it is similar to our lockdown situation with the Corona Virus. We cannot even visit relatives or church' members who are sick at home or in hospital. For me particularly, as a minister who loves to go around in my local community, this is particularly frustrating and depressing!

2)- The practical implications of the disciples' state of **fear** could be: post-traumatic disorder, depression, paralysis. This can lead to a loss of identity, loss of a sense of direction, hatred of others... doubt (This is when some people may start wondering: Is God still with us?)

It was in the middle of such a depressing situation that Jesus appeared to his disciples:

3)-After showing them his sides and his pierced hands as proof that it was Him-the Risen Christ and not a ghost, He offered them words of reassurance: '**Do not be**

afraid'. Then, He offered them His PEACE – SHALOM. The gift of Peace was what they needed in that moment of post-traumatic disorder. I personally take note of how Jesus did not show any judgemental attitude towards His disciples, despite their collective failure towards Him: they deserted Him. They could not watch and pray with Him and Peter notoriously denied Him ... Yet, the Risen Christ did not start by pointing fingers at any of them! This is a lesson for us, in our daily relationship with one another. The fact that for few weeks now, all our church' buildings, schools, businesses and our own doors are closed, is a proof that there is an atmosphere OF FEAR due to the Corona Virus. Imagine how big our Joy would be to hear the Risen Christ, speaking directly in our situation saying: 'You may be wondering what the future holds for you. But I am telling you: I am the only one who holds the future. DO NOT BE AFRAID THEN. Let's play our part by observing the NHS practical instructions. Keeping ourselves safe by observing the social distancing. Let us imagine Jesus saying to us: DO NOT BE AFRAID: In your loneliness, I am with you. In your state of Fear, I will give you my Peace –the Real SHALOM. In your anxiety, I will give you my reassuring presence. What a Joy that would be?

4)- Jesus performed an **ACT OF NEW CREATION on His disciples**: He breathed onto them and gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is a strong evidence that the breathe of life is what makes a big difference between a living body and a dead body. In medical terms, we may talk about the vital role that oxygen plays in the human body. We could say that the events that happened in Jerusalem were so life draining that the disciples were like walking dead. They were paralysed. And as Jesus appeared to those confused disciples, He breathed onto them as a sign of a new creation, a new lifeline, a new purpose in life, a new hope to move forward.

5)- The disciples were **empowered** to forgive as they were forgiven. Jesus said: 'Forgive one another as I have forgiven you. He also gave them the most life transforming gift: the gift of love. 'Love one another as I have loved you'. By doing so, the Risen Christ empowered His disciples to show love to one another as He loved them despite everything that happened. The lesson here is that, whatever we may be going through with ourselves, with some friends of ours or family members, let me tell you: Forgiveness and love are special gifts from the Risen Christ. He would like us to pass those gifts on to one another.

Through those details, Jesus challenged us individually and collectively to stand up and live, not as if we were still on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, but to live as Easter People. This is particularly vital in our today's world where fear, anxiety, confusion are taking over our lives.

It has been particularly inspiring to see how creative people have become in these times difficult times, trying to help some of the most vulnerable in our local communities. I think of that young girl aged 8 who has used her pocket money to make nearly two hundreds of masks for NHS staff, by using her grand' Mum's 3D printer in her kitchen. I have also been deeply moved by the amazing sacrificial action by the war veteran, Captain Tom Moore, aged 99 who has raised more than 12 million by walking with his Zimmer frame in his back garden. How inspiring! This is a challenge for us Christians

to find the way to be more compassionate, more caring for one another, fighting for justice and righteousness. As we may have discovered, the corona virus does not respect the powerful. It does not distinguish between the rich and poor, it does not know races, colour, gender or cultural background.

We cannot pretend to be Church of the Risen Christ if we only preach, but fail to live as Easter people. This is where I like the words by prophet Jeremiah saying: '**Seek the Peace and Welfare of the city where you live. For if that city is at peace, you too will be at peace and you will prosper.**' Let's then reach out to one another. Let us show one Love! As the late Martin Luther King Jnr said: 'Unless we learn to live together in harmony as brothers and sisters, we would die together as fools.'

Here, I would like to paraphrase for you, some extracts from an inspiring book written many years ago by Jean Vanier: the title of the book is '**The Broken Body**'....

'Many of us flee from people crying out in pain, people who are broken. We hide in a world of distraction and pleasure or we get ourselves so busy with so many things to do to the point that we have no time for ourselves and others. We can even hide ourselves in various groups of prayer and spiritual exercises, not knowing that a light is shining in the poor, the weak, the lonely and the depressed. But the reality is that we do need to run away from people who are in pain, or who are broken, but like Jesus, we need to have the compassionate heart in order to walk towards those people, to touch them. Then, we'll find rising up within us the well of love, springing from the divine power that removed the block of stone from the entrance of the grave where Jesus was buried, opening up the way for his resurrection and a new life for ourselves. In walking along this way, the Risen Christ will reveal to us the new meaning of pain and darkness; He will teach us that once we let Him enter our lives, anger, bitterness, resentment and grudges should no longer prevail.

Then, the Risen Christ will teach us how joy springs from the wounds of brokenness. He will reveal to us that He is hidden in the poor and the weak. Christ is hidden in that neighbour, that colleague, that brother or sister we find so difficult to connect with.

For, let's not forget: Jesus died a lonely death, gasping for air and crying for water. In the same way today, I truly believe that Jesus is present in our hospital wards where Corona virus patients are treated. Christ is present in our ICU units, in our nursing Homes.

Therefore, when we allow the Risen Christ to come into our loneliness, into our private and locked and closed lives, He will breathe a new spirit of understanding, revealing to us the way to refine, rebuild, renew and receive the relationship of gentle love and fidelity that is at the origin of all existence. Very often this starts as a tiny seed which can grow into a whole new pattern of personal relationship with the Risen Christ.

Let us walk together along this path with our sisters and brothers in this broken world of ours.

Let us walk together along this path with Jesus, the Risen Christ and discover that it is a path of love, hope and forgiveness.

That's what it means to live as Easter people!

Let's pray.

May the Risen Christ who conquered death, give us new hope, new joy and victory over all sorts of personal issues and may He take control of every aspects of our daily life. We pray that the Risen Christ may give a new breath of divine inspiration to medical doctors, consultants, engineers and all those who work in scientific research, so that they may find a cure to this dreadful disease for God's Glory. Amen!

Prayers of intercession

God of peace, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all: We pray particularly so that through your grace and mercy, you may intervene in the major health and economic turmoil the whole world is going through now, due to the Corona virus.

We pray for all the key workers and the amazing NHS staff members who are constantly putting their lives at risk by caring daily for thousands of patients across the UK. We pray specifically for Nurses, Medical Doctors, Consultants, Para-Medics, Care Assistants, Social Service Officers, so that, in their tiredness and personal anxiety, they may hear your voice saying to them: Do not be afraid: I am with you!

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray, Lord, for all who strive for justice and for our welfare: Police Officers, Teachers, Fire Brigade Officers, Children and Youth Workers, Civil Servants, Street Pastors, cleaners and rubbish collectors ... May you Lord grant them your divine strength to carry out their duties with integrity and wisdom.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray that you may govern the hearts and minds of those in authority at the levels of Central and Local governments: We pray especially for a prompt recovery of our Prime Minister, Boris Johnson and for all the members of his Cabinet. We also pray for MPs and their special advisers. May you grant them your divine wisdom in these times where, even the best experts are themselves confused.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, we pray for all vulnerable women, young girls, men, children who are in abusive relationship. May you Lord intervene in order to bring release to those victims of human exploitation. We pray for the families in many nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of human cruelty and needless wars. May they also taste at last your Peace. For you have come to bring Good news to the poor and release to the captives...

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all who lack faith and for those who are hostile to it, that God will open their hearts to the truth and lead them to faith and obedience.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Finally, we pray for Church' members, for our friends, family members or colleagues who are struggling to cope with the current lockdown situation. We pray for thousands of families who have been bereaved or unwell due to the Corona virus or other diseases

May you Lord comfort them and heal their inner wounds. Through Jesus Christ' name we pray. Amen!

The Lord's Prayer

**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.**

Before we receive the blessing, I would like to leave you with some extracts from hymn StF 351:

In Christ alone my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song ...
My comforter, my All in All, here in the love of Christ I stand.

Blessing

Blessings to us, O God, this day, freshly made.

In the chorus of birds – bless us!

In the scent of blossom - bless us!

In the wet grass and the spring flowers - bless us.

Bless us and heal us!

And may the power and blessing of the Risen Christ dwell on us and our families,
now and forever. Amen.

ALLELUIAH! THANKS BE TO GOD!