

Welcome and notices

ACM today at 2pm via Zoom

Call to worship

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

Opening prayer

Gracious God, Lord of Life and Conqueror of death, we gather to praise and worship you, for in your love and mercy, and by your power and sovereignty, you have won a great victory through the resurrection of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. By your Holy Spirit, may we know your resurrection power in our lives and at this time; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Confession

We read in 1 John 1:8-9 that 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Therefore, let us confess our sins.

God of mercy and love, in humbleness of heart we confess our sins. We forget to love and serve you, and wander from your ways. We are careless of your world, and put its life in danger. We talk of our concern for others but fail to match our words with action. Merciful God, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As you have prayed so now receive God's pardon and peace. Know that he remembers your sins no more. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Song: The greatest day in history

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

The greatest day in history,
death is beaten, You have rescued me.
Sing it out: Jesus is alive.

The empty cross, the empty grave,
life eternal, You have won the day.
Shout it out: Jesus is alive, He's alive.

*And oh, happy day, happy day,
You washed my sin away.
Oh, happy day, happy day,
I'll never be the same.
Forever I am changed.*

When I stand in that place,
free at last, meeting face to face,
I am Yours, Jesus, You are mine.
Endless joy, perfect peace,
earthly pain finally will cease.
Celebrate, Jesus is alive, He's alive.

And oh, happy day...

Oh, what a glorious day,
what a glorious way
That You have saved me.
And oh, what a glorious day,
what a glorious name,
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-34

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy

to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he 'has put everything under his feet'. Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

²⁹ Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised for them? ³⁰ And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? ³¹ I face death every day – yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'

³³ Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'³⁴ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God – I say this to your shame.

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Offertory prayer

**Blessed are you, Lord our God,
from the first to the last.
We offer to you all we have and all we are
for the good of your church
and the glory of your name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

REFLECTION: RESURRECTION GOSPEL (2) But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead Part 1: What if...?

We are here in this Easter season with all the joy and hope that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead brings us. And yet this joy and hope are tempered by the fact that still

thousands are dying every day from covid-19 around the world. Yet another wave of coronavirus is sweeping across parts of the world such as India and Brazil. So our Easter message sits amid the suffering of the world, but then it always has. It's just that at present the suffering is on a wider scale rarely seen other than in war zones. There is the tension of the most glorious fact of the resurrection and the most ghastly fact of the pandemic and our human experience of suffering. We can confidently affirm that death is defeated by Christ's resurrection but death is not yet destroyed. Only when Christ returns will death come to an end.

This is what Paul is dealing with in this great resurrection passage. He was writing to the Christians in Corinth, a small group of believers amid a great Greek city with its culture and belief that there is no such thing as resurrection. The believers in Corinth would have heard Paul's teaching on resurrection, and like all of us, they would have taken that belief and tried to make it fit in with their culture. They might have said something like this: 'It's a lovely idea – resurrection, a beautiful symbolic way of talking, a kind of metaphor of what our Greek philosophers have always said, that our souls will go on living in some way and in some place, but there will be no return to a bodily kind of life as we have now for we know there is no resurrection from the dead.' It's a view like this that Paul confronts head on in v12-13. 'But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.'

In response, Paul does two things. Firstly he does a kind of 'what if' scenario. What if there is no resurrection. What are the consequences if God had not raised Jesus from the dead? And

secondly, a 'so what?' So, what if Christ has been raised? What are the consequences if God did raise Jesus from the dead? Let's deal with these in turn. Paul writes of five consequences if God had not raised Jesus from the dead:

The gospel is nonsense (v14). 'our preaching is useless and so is your faith.' The word for useless means it is empty, meaningless. If we are left at the cross with the death of Christ but no resurrection, the whole good news falls flat on its face.

Our faith is useless (v14). It's not only that the gospel is useless but our faith is useless. It's a personal matter. Without the resurrection, what we personally have believed is useless. How would we know we are forgiven? How would we know we have eternal life? No, without the resurrection our faith is as useless as a season ticket for Norwich City during lockdown.

The third consequence if God had not raised Jesus from the dead is that we are liars (v15). It's bad enough to bear false witness about another person. How much more so to falsify the truth about God? 'More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.' Without the resurrection, we would be lying about God. How serious is that? We live in a world where fake news is presented as real news. Well, if there is no resurrection then we have been perpetrating fake news for 2000 years. All we have claimed to be gospel is fake if there is no resurrection.

We have not been freed from our sins (v17). 'And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.' The great promise of the gospel is that by faith in Jesus Christ, in the crucified and risen Christ, we have forgiveness of our sins. If Christ hasn't

been raised, we are not forgiven, we are still 'in sin' and separated from God. We are, as it were, eternally stuffed! With a useless faith in a dead Christ we continue in our sins and death remains victorious.

Believers who have died are lost (v18). Paul speaks of death for the believer as 'falling asleep,' so those in Corinth who have died in Christ will never wake up if there is no resurrection. The same is true for believers everywhere. If there is no resurrection our loved ones who believed in the Lord are lost for eternity. If they believed in a dead Christ, then they are just as dead as he is.

So, these five reasons point us to the fact that 'if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men' (v19). We are pitiful if there is no resurrection. These reasons are what it would be like if Christ were not raised. We would have pinned all our hopes on someone who is now dead. There would be no hope, no faith, no forgiveness and no future.

In a moment we are going to look at what the truth means for us. But first we are going to have a song:

Song: If Christ had not been raised from death

<https://youtu.be/nRqeogaMgs4>

If Christ had not been raised from death
Our faith would be in vain
Our preaching but a waste of breath.
Our sin and guilt remain.
But now the Lord is risen indeed
He rules in earth and heaven
His gospel meets a world of need
In Christ we are forgiven.

If Christ still lay within the tomb
Then death would be the end
And we should face our final doom
With neither guide nor friend
But now the Saviour is raised up
So when a Christian dies
We mourn, yet look to God in hope
In Christ, the saints arise

If Christ had not been truly raised
His church would live a lie;
His name should never more be praised,
His words deserve to die.
But now our great Redeemer lives;
Through him we are restored;
His word endures, his church revives
In Christ, our risen Lord.

REFLECTION: Part 2: So what...?

At the beginning I asked two questions, 'what if...' and 'so what...' We have dealt with the first question, now we come to the second. 'But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep' writes Paul (v20). This is the confident assertion that Paul makes in v20. So what that Christ was raised from the dead. What does it matter in times like these? There are three things that means it matters:

The cause of death has been dealt with (v21-22).

'For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.' In Adam sin entered the world and therefore death entered the world. As members of the fallen human race we all die.

We still live in a world of sin and death. Christians are not immune to the problems of the world. Like everyone else we get sick, are not immune to viruses, we have accidents, suffer difficulties and ultimately we die. These are all part of living in a fallen world. But what

Paul is saying here is that the tyranny of sin and death has been invaded and defeated by the reign of the resurrected Lord. When we put ourselves under the reign of God then the cause of death, sin, is dealt with, and we are no longer under the reign of sin and death. Instead we are made alive in Christ.

Do you know what a universalist is? It is someone who believes that all people will be saved, which contrary to what Scripture says. They believe this because they read v22 and think that is what it is saying. 'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.' Seems pretty clear if you stop at this point. However, Paul goes on to say, 'But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits, then, when he comes, those who belong to him (v23). As we read in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17).

The fear of death has been broken (cf. Hebrews 2:14-15).

Our society has a real problem with taking about death because of its journey into secularism. Death is taboo. But what should be the Christian's attitude to death? It is still an enemy, unnatural, unpleasant, undignified. In fact as Paul described death as 'The last enemy to be destroyed' (v26). And yet it is a defeated enemy. Because Christ has taken away our sins, death has lost its power to harm, and therefore to terrify. Jesus summed this up in one of his greatest affirmations: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die' (John 11:25). Jesus is the resurrection of believers who die and the life of believers who live.'

Are you afraid of death? The promise to believers is that you will live even though you will die. Not that you will just survive but that you will be resurrected. None of us will escape death, but it is powerless to overcome us when

we are in Christ because he is the resurrected Christ. This is the victory of Christ in which he allows us to enter.

Imagine England winning the World Cup. Now imagine you being taken from your chair watching it to participating in the celebrations on the pitch with the trophy in hand. Well this is far greater than winning a World Cup – this is winning life. Have you entered into that victory?

The death of death is guaranteed (v25-6).

Finally, Paul says, 'For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (v25). Death is still an enemy to be faced, the last enemy we'll ever face. That death is the enemy is obvious to anyone who has been bereaved. Some, trying to be kind, have tried to soften the blow by pretending that death doesn't matter that much, but this is blasphemous nonsense. It does matter. To say that death is anything other than the enemy is to deny the goodness, beauty and power of God's creation. The point of the resurrection of Jesus is the defeat of death and the giving of life. The resurrection isn't saying well death isn't so bad after all. No. Tell that to someone who has lost a loved one. But death is a defeated enemy and an enemy whose doom is already foretold and is coming ever closer. Death shall have no dominion. Paul wrote in Romans 6:8 'Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.'

The cause of death has been dealt with.

The fear of death has been broken.

The death of death is guaranteed.

I conclude with another passage of scripture in which we see death gone forever. 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride

beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with his people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making all things new!" (Revelation 21:1-4).

That's where the Bible's great story comes to an end, that's where it is headed. Is it where your story is headed? For this is the future for God's people. Is it your future? Let's pray.

Almighty God, whose Son is the resurrection and the life of all who trust in him, raise us we pray from the death of sin into the life of faith, hope, and love; for your glory's sake. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

God of love and power, we pray for your Church in this parish and throughout the world, that, through the courage and faith of your people, your word may be preached and lived.

We pray for the Queen and all the Royal Family at this time of loss and mourning. Give to them the strength and grace they will need for the days ahead. We thank you for Prince Philip, for his service and devotion to the Queen over so many years. We thank you for his Christian faith, his firm belief in the promise of eternal life to those who believe in the crucified and risen Lord, and rejoice that he now shares in that eternal joy and peace where life is lived in your very presence.

We pray for our community, our country and all the nations of the world in this time of pandemic, that we may grasp the importance

of a vaccine for everyone across the world with or without ability to pay.

We pray for all who are in trouble, that those who are sick may be cared for, those who are lonely be sustained, those who are oppressed be strengthened, and those who mourn be comforted, and those who are close to death may know their risen Lord.

We give thanks for those who have died in the faith, especially those known to us, who have entered into the joy and peace of your presence. May we who follow their example also share with them in the glory of eternal life in our risen Lord Jesus, who with the Father and Holy Spirit is worshipped and praised for ever. **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.**

Song: All my days

<https://youtu.be/xke5TIU-Nqk>

All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
Give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
For in my helplessness you heard my cry,
And waves of mercy poured down on my life.

I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails;
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
Of death defeated and life without end.

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the Risen One, heaven's Champion,
And you reign, you reign over all!*

I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades;
Where countless worshippers will share one
song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

Closing prayer and blessing

May the power of the cross, the joy of the resurrection, and the presence of our risen Lord be with you, now and always. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and with all whom you love this day and for evermore. **Amen.**