**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**Sunday April 12th – Easter Day**

**“Why Does Easter Matter?” (John 20:1-18)**

*Dear Friends,*

*Welcome to our ‘virtual service’ on this Easter Day:*

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!*

*I hope that you’re blessed by it, and that you will continue to listen in – both during this lockdown time, in which we cannot physically meet in our churches, and also in future when we’ll be in our churches again, but will still have our weekly sermons recorded and posted as podcasts.*

*Do try to join in worship today, singing the great Easter Hymn, Jesus Christ Is Risen Today: follow with the words on the next page, and be accompanied by this Songs of Praise recording on YouTube:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6sj9ljVsfk>

*May you have a hope-filled, joyful and blessed Easter,*



**Rev. Tim Chambers
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Alleluia! Christ Is Risen! **He Is Risen indeed!
Alleluia!**

**The Collect for Easter Day (Common Worship)**

God of glory,
by the raising of your Son
you have broken the chains of death and hell:
fill your Church with faith and hope;
for a new day has dawned
and the way to life stands open
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
**Amen.**

**Jesus Christ Is Risen Today (recording from Songs of Praise)**

Do join in with the great Easter Hymn, using this YouTube link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6sj9ljVsfk>

Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!
Our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
Who did once upon the cross, Alleluia!
Suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!

Hymns of praise then let us sing Alleluia!
Unto Christ our heavenly King, Alleluia!
Who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
Sinners to redeem and save. Alleluia!

For the pains which he endured, Alleluia!
Our salvation have procured, Alleluia!
Now above the sky he's King, Alleluia!
Where the angels ever sing. Alleluia!

**Gospel Reading: John 20:1-18 (New International Version)**

**Read by Amy Taylor**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’

‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’ 14 At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’

16 Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means ‘Teacher’).

17 Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Sermon: “Why Does Easter Matter?” - Rev. Tim Chambers**

Easter is one of the occasions in the calendar that, for many people, is a time when they *particularly* connect with their local church. Perhaps especially in small communities like ours, there can be a real coming together with your friends and neighbours, to mark a significant point in the year - whether you consider yourself to have a faith, or possibly not. Maybe there’s a sense of shared experience, of being part of ‘something bigger’, that we feel at this time of year.

If this applies to you, and you *wouldn’t* consider yourself to be a regular member of one of our six churches’ congregations, an *especial* welcome to you, this Easter Day.

An Easter Day that is, on the one hand, completely *unlike* any other, all of us have known; but which is also, on the other hand, exactly the *same* as every other Easter Day.

“How can this *possibly* be the case?” I hear you exclaim. “Surely this Coronavirus epidemic, which is impacting *every* corner of the lives of *every* one of us; surely that means that *this* Easter is *different*?”

Well, bear with me, and I’ll do my best to explain to you why I believe that this *isn’t* the case. Why, despite *everything* that’s going on around us right now, the message of the Easter story is the *same* for each one of us - and just as *vitally important* for each one of us – *this* year, as it is *every* year.

Some of you may have seen a picture of our daughter, Esther - along with Clare and me, in March’s edition of the Cranmer Group Newsletter. Esther has just turned two, and is a bundle of boundless energy and relentless questions.

She’s our first child, so I don’t have any previous direct experience of this as a parent, but I’m assured that there’s a stage, coming up fairly soon for us, where all little ones do is ask, “Why?” “Why, Mummy?” “Why, Daddy?” “Why?” “Why?”

Well, Esther hasn’t reached *that* stage yet – it’s obviously something we have to look forward to! Rather, all of *her* questions at the moment are, “What you doing, Mummy?” “What you doing, Daddy?” “What you doing?”

I wonder whether this questioning of Esther’s is almost like ours in relation to Easter. I think that, even in our increasingly secular society, most people are still pretty familiar with the basics of the story of the life of Jesus. That he’s the son of God; that he was born to Mary; that he lived in the Holy Land two thousand years ago; that he ministered to the people around him, teaching, performing miracles, and healing. There’s extremely strong historical evidence for this, and also for the fact that he was condemned to death by the Roman authorities; that he endured an agonizing death by crucifixion; and that – as Christians believe – he rose from the dead three days later.

His resurrection is, of course, what we celebrate *today*, and on *every* Easter day.

This is, if you like, in Esther-speak, “What you doing, Jesus?“

But I wonder if *we* – rather like Esther at the moment – if we haven’t quite got onto the “why?“ *Why* does it matter to *you* and to *me*; *why* does it matter to every single man, woman and child on this earth, that Jesus died and rose again on the third day?

In this getting stuck on the “what”, and not quite grasping the “why”, we’re in good company. If we look carefully at our reading this morning, from St. John’s Gospel, we hear that Peter and John, rushing to Jesus’s burial place in response to Mary’s cries, went – after a bit of understandable hesitation - into the tomb. They saw the grave clothes, partially moved to one side. They see the “*what*” of the tomb, no longer containing Jesus’s body; John even says that “he saw and believed” – he recognized that the only explanation for all of this, could be that Jesus had risen from the dead.

And in the Gospels there’s repeated evidence that Jesus met people, touched people, talked with people, and even cooked a meal for people, *all* after he’d died on the cross. There are *fifteen* historical references to Jesus interacting with other people, all after his resurrection, of which the most beautiful and poignant is in today’s reading, as Jesus calls Mary by name.

But, even though Peter and John realized the “what”, St John also says, in verse 9, “They still did not *understand* from Scripture that Jesus *had* to rise from the dead.” They didn’t understand *why* Jesus’s resurrection was of central importance to them; *why* Jesus’s resurrection was *so* important to all of the disciples. Why Jesus’s resurrection was so important to every person who has followed him as their Lord ever since that day; and why Jesus’s resurrection is still of central importance to each and every one of us today.

*Why* *do* Jesus’s death on the cross on Good Friday, and his rising from the dead three days later, on Easter Day, *matter*?

What *difference* does it make, to you, and to me – *this* Easter; *every* Easter; every day of our *past* lives, before we’d ever heard of Coronavirus; every day of our *present* lives, as we live under the strangeness and difficulty of lockdown; and every day of our *future* lives, when we come out the other side of all this?

The resurrection matters for three reasons, and they are these.

Firstly, my past, and your past, can be *forgiven*.

This is truly good news.

Have you ever been halfway through something – from, at the most banal end of the spectrum, building an Ikea wardrobe, to, right at the other, a really significant relationship in your life - and wished that you could start all over again? Many people feel that way about life. They get halfway through and wish they could start again. We’ve all done things we wish we hadn't done; said things we wish we hadn't said; and thought things we wish we hadn't thought. I know that I have. I, like you - I’m sure - have regrets. We all feel bad about things. We all have guilt, and for many of us, that guilt stops us getting on with the present, because we’re shackled to the past.

But the Good News is this. As chapter 2 of St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians, in the Bible’s New Testament, tells us, "He [Jesus] has forgiven all our sins and cancelled every debt we owe. Christ has done away with it, by nailing it to the cross."

Jesus paid for my guilt on the cross. Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross, so that you and I can stop nailing *our*selves to that cross. He wants to forgive my past, and your past, and cancel every single debt that you and I owe – emotional debts, relational debts, every single thing you and I have done wrong.

So that’s the first difference that Easter makes – that my past, and your past, can be *forgiven*. And the second difference is this: that your, and my, *present* problems can be borne.

At a time like this, as so many of us, struggling with the huge impact of the Coronavirus on our lives and on those we love; surrounded by difficulty after difficulty; this might sound like a very glib claim to make. I understand that life for many of us right now, is by far the hardest we’ve ever known it - physically, emotionally, economically. We feel powerless in the face of all that confronts us.

If that’s you, and there’s anything practically, relationally or spiritually I can do to help you in this, please do get in touch with me either by phone or by email, and I will do all that I can to help. If you don’t have my contact details, please take them from our website, www.cranmergroup.org.uk, or ask your Church Wardens for them, and they will happily put you in touch with me. Please also know that I hold all of you, in all of our villages, and further afield, in my prayers every day.

But when we feel powerless, we need a power *greater* than ourselves; a power that comes from the God who wants more than anything to be in relationship with every one of us. We read in the first chapter of St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, of the “incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead.” The same power that God used in resurrecting Jesus two thousand years ago is open to us also.

Neither you nor I know what the future holds; significant elements of it are out of our control; but it’s not out of *God’s* control, or beyond God’s *power*. The God whom, we’re reassured by Scripture, only has what’s ultimately good, in his plans for each one of us. The God who, in the person of Jesus, reaches out with compassion to grieving, despairing Mary, and comforts her: “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you are looking for?” And the God who, in the person of Jesus, knows & calls her – as he knows & calls each one of us – by name.

So, firstly, Easter means that our past can be *forgiven*. And, secondly, Easter means that, with God, in the person of Jesus, all-powerful and all-loving, our present problems can be borne.

And thirdly, Easter means that my future, & your future, can be secure. I’m sure many of us will know someone who’s been directly impacted by Covid-19, or perhaps even know someone who’s tragically died after contracting the virus. We’re acutely conscious of our own mortality, & that of those dearest to us.

But because of Easter, we can be assured, in and through the person of Jesus Christ, of life that is not bounded by death.

That first Easter, Jesus not only died, he passed through and beyond death, raised to eternal life, ultimately with his Father in heaven. And because he died and rose again, you and I can place our trust completely in his promise to each one of us, that “[he is] the way the truth and the life”; that through him, we can be united eternally with his father, *our* loving Heavenly Father.

So, this is why Easter is of ultimate importance to everyone. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus that first Easter, each one of us can have a past forgiven *by* him; a present borne *through* him; and a future eternally secure *with* him.

Jesus doesn’t say that a life lived with him will be free of struggles. He doesn’t say that, by following him, the Coronavirus magically won’t impact us, or the lockdown somehow won’t apply to us.

But Jesus *does* promise us a life freed from the guilt of the past; a life in the present, full of resurrection hope and Easter joy; and a life in the future, eternally with him and his Father. And it’s because Jesus - and these promises that he makes to each one of us - is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow; that *this* Easter Day, is the same as *every* Easter Day.

May I wish each one of you, your families, and those whom you love, not just a happy, but a truly *hopeful* and *joyful* Easter.

In the name of the resurrected Jesus, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Clare Chambers**

*Some intercessions based on prayers written by a Jesuit community in the United States, and by Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference:*

Jesus Christ, you travelled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing and your love.

Lord, in your mercy…
**Hear our prayer**

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through the excellence of medical care. Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbours from helping one another.

Lord, in your mercy…
**Hear our prayer**

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders. Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Lord, in your mercy…
**Hear our prayer**

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Lord, in your mercy…
**Hear our prayer**

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Lord, in your mercy…
**Hear our prayer**

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Lord, in your mercy…
**Hear our prayer**

And at this Easter time,
as we celebrate Christ’s triumph over death,
we declare with joy and with hope that…

We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.

We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours’ safety.

We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.

We are your people, God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs,
for as long as it takes,
wherever you call us.

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Collect for Easter Day (Book of Common Prayer)**

Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech thee, that as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.
**Amen**

**A Closing Blessing**

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**