

Cheshire South Methodist Circuit 
Service at home sheet Sunday 27th April 2025

Opening Doors

Call to worship:

The Lord is Risen: He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

We come to worship and praise God as Easter people, who know that Christ our Saviour is alive today and forever more.

StF no. 303 *I know that my Redeemer lives*

1 I know that my Redeemer lives -
What joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting head,
He lives, my everlasting head!

2 He lives, to bless me with his love;
He lives, to plead for me above;
He lives, my hungry soul to feed;
He lives, to help in time of need,
He lives, to help in time of need.

3 He lives, and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives, my mansion to prepare;
He lives, to lead me safely there,
He lives to lead me safely there.

4 He lives, all glory to his name;
He lives, my Saviour, still the same;
What joy the blessed assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!

CCLI 821956 Samuel Medley

Prayers of adoration and confession

Father God, creator of all things, you existed before the world began, you are with us today and you will stay with us for ever.

Jesus, all powerful Saviour, you won the battle of the cross and exchanged your crown of thorns for a throne in heaven. You are exalted at God's right hand, where you continue to intercede on our behalf.

Holy Spirit, breath of God, you are within us, stirring our souls and enabling us to witness to the truth, to share the Good News of freedom from sin and sure salvation.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, open wide the doors of our hearts that we might be willingly sent to work and witness to your glory.

In the name of our Risen Lord Jesus, we pray. **Amen.**

Lord God, you call us to be witnesses for you, but very often fear holds us back. We are afraid of speaking out, for lack of confidence or in face of hostility. We are sorry when our fears dominate and we hold back. Sometimes, indeed, like Thomas, we demand more evidence of your promises and presence before we are willing to say or do what we should. Too often we lock ourselves away in the security of fellow believers, in the safety of our churches, unwilling to risk ourselves in the wider world, content to limit ourselves to preaching to the converted.

Lord, we are sorry that we have fallen short of what you require; that instead of being joyful Easter people, we remain stuck in the sadness of Good Friday. Come to us Lord, through our closed hearts, overcome our doubts, fill us with confidence, strengthen our faith, breathe on us and reassure us of your peace. Our Saviour hung on the cross and shed his blood, precisely in order to pour out his forgiveness upon us and release us from our sins.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Reading: John 20: 19 - 31

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Purpose of John's Gospel

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe^[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon: Open Doors

John tells us, in his account of the Resurrection just before the passage set for today, that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, outside the empty tomb and, once she recognised him, she rushed to tell the disciples she had seen the risen Lord. However, this did not excite them at all. On the contrary, they remained locked away in fear of the Jewish authorities.

It is details like this that give the Resurrection stories the ring of truth. For a start, our Lord appeared to a woman and asked her to testify that he was alive which, in those days, would not have been at all trustworthy; only the evidence of men was considered to be credible. Then, the disciples, who were

obviously confused by this amazing news, were shown as fearful rather than confident, and unsure what to do next.

Of course, Jesus knew how to respond and, without warning, he passed through the locked doors and joined them, reassuring them with the words 'Peace be with you'. After he showed them his pierced hands and side, to prove that he was not just a figment of their troubled minds, nor a ghost, they were finally able to begin rejoicing. Yet Jesus went straight on to issue a great challenge: 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.' And, in order to enable them to fulfil the task of witnessing to the world, he breathed on them and gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, foreshadowing the great events of Pentecost to come.

The process of transforming the disciples from broken, disappointed people, who had seen their Lord crucified, into a confident group who would begin the task of spreading the word took a little more time to complete, but doors were opened and that work of witness continues today. The disciples were collectively charged with spreading the good news about the grace of God (forgiveness of sins) and new life in Christ (life in all its fullness). That is the challenge I would like to explore for the rest of my message because, as Easter people, following in the disciples' footsteps, we have a vital job to do.

Jesus said 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you', which is my text for today. It means that like the disciples, we have to open those doors behind which we often shelter, and instead get out into the world. John Wesley, our founder, was a great example of this for he realised that it was no good waiting for people to come to church, rather he went to meet them where they were, outdoors at the pithead for the miners of Kingswood, or in the open air in Cornwall. He was criticised as a field preacher, yet his call was to go to the unchurched, those who needed him most.

I was reminded of this a week ago in the middle of Crewe, on Holy Saturday, when this year's walk of witness was held in the town (rather than on the usual Good Friday). Aside from the procession and hymn-singing, some participants were dressed in biblical costume, representing characters from the Easter story: the Catholic priest from St Mary's was dressed as a Roman centurion! They mingled with the shoppers and gave them Christian booklets, while children were attracted to the crafts of making crosses and Easter scenes. We may have got used to worshipping with older people, yet here were many youngsters among us, some of them from other parts of the world, worshipping together in the town centre. What joy! 'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you', said Jesus.

We have looked for ways of responding to this task at Wells Green in Wistaston, where I belong. Since the pandemic we have been opening our doors by presenting the great Christian festivals outside our premises. At the beginning of Holy Week, we decorated our windows with pictures of Palm Sunday, and we invited passers-by to take a palm cross from a box by the door. Then on Easter Day, we put the cross we had decorated during the service outside the church, and encouraged members of the public to add a flower of their own from the bucket below. In this way, we are trying to share our faith with the community we seek to serve, by reflecting our activities indoors.

Of course, it's good to spend time with fellow-Christians in our places of worship, where we feel secure, but we can end up shutting ourselves away in a safe space, a bit like those disciples on Easter Day. Our Lord, however, calls us to be bolder, and to be sent as witnesses into the wider world. As one minister I was listening to lately put it, 'When I speak to my congregation on a Sunday, I want to prepare them for the situations and people they will encounter on a Monday and during the week'. Some of us may not be able to get out and about so much anymore, but we may have a carer or cleaner coming to see us, or a neighbour popping in and a friend on the phone, all presenting opportunities to witness to our beliefs, not least at this wonderful time of Easter. Let us remember that our risen Lord

Jesus continues to equip us for the task by filling us with the Holy Spirit: 'As the Father sent me', he says, 'so I am sending you'. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Risen Lord, teach us how to tell the good news of salvation to all those seeking the message of forgiveness and a new way of living. In these troubled and anxious times, help us to share the hope you bring, and speak to those who fear for the future through our conversations and our prayers, that all the world make come to believe in you.

Risen Lord, teach us how to show the good news of salvation to those who are blind to your living presence in the world. Reveal yourself to them through our loving attitudes, our smiles of friendship and, in these times of selfishness and immorality, by our willingness to stand up and be counted on issues of justice and righteousness.

Christ is alive!

Risen Lord, teach us how to make the good news of your salvation real to those who do not know your loving touch. Reach out to them in situations of want and poverty, through our caring actions, our willing support of those in need, and the warmth of our affection.

Finally, Risen Lord, teach us how to embody the good news of salvation by fulfilling our calling as a Church, uniting us in love for you and one another that, as you were sent to us, so we may continue the work that you began.

We ask these prayers in the name of our Risen Lord Jesus, who revealed himself to doubting disciples and gave them the faith and confidence to witness to the whole world. And so, we pray as he taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

StF no. 297 *Christ is alive! Let Christians sing*

1 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
His cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

2 Christ is alive! No longer bound
To distant years in Palestine,
But saving, healing, here and now,
And touching every place and time.

3 In every insult, rift and war,
Where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
And lives, where even hope has died.

4 Women and men, in age and youth,
Can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
And find the way, the life, the truth,
Revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

5 Christ is alive and comes to bring
Good news to this and every age,
Till earth and sky and ocean ring
With joy, with justice, love and praise.

CCLI 821965 Brian Wren

Benediction

May our faith be enriched, our belief strengthened and our spirits raised, so that Christ may be revealed and honoured in our lives and witness. May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and remain with us, always. **Amen**

This worship service has been prepared by Dr. Malcolm Crook