



Call to Worship

The stone has been rolled away. **The grave clothes are lying in a heap. The body is gone.**
Mary's weeping is halted by the man's questions: **Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?**
Let us proclaim with Mary: **We have seen the risen Lord! Christ is Risen! Alleluia!**

Hymn: StF 298 *Christ the Lord is Risen Today* (Charles Wesley)

Christ the Lord is risen today; Alleluia!
All creation joins to say: Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high; Alleluia!
Sing, you heavens; let earth, reply: Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won; Alleluia!
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; Alleluia!
Christ has burst the gates of hell: Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King; Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now your sting? Alleluia!

Once he died our souls to save; Alleluia!
Where's your victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head; Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise; Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: Alleluia!

King of Glory! Soul of bliss! Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
You to know, your power to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love: Alleluia!

Opening Prayer

O Holy One, as the sun boldly rises to meet a new day, rise in our lives this Easter morning, for you are our hope, our life, and our joy. We bring our Easter shouts of surprise and joy for news of your victory over the powers of death and evil is news so startling, so amazing, so different from the news that bombards us day by day. We welcome your resurrection for it is life changing, life giving and life sustaining, but at the same time, we confess the ways that we have continued to remain in our tombs of sin and death. Forgive us when we are timid and afraid, unable to believe your promises, unable to offer all of our lives to You. Forgive us as we cling to the past and fail to look for the new things that you want to do in our lives and the world. Forgive us for our doubts and pessimism for the future as we fail to rise to your call. Still-creating God. have mercy on us and by your grace bring us salvation. Amen.

Scripture John 20:1-18 and Isaiah 43:18-19

Sermon *Rising to the Call: What are you looking for?*

This beautiful sunrise picture that we are using today as a sign of resurrection was taken by David Welbourn from the top of a hill called Thorpe Cloud in Derbyshire at 6.30 a.m. on the Tuesday of Holy Week back in 2017. In January this year my husband Adrian and I took a week's holiday in Derbyshire and hiked to the top of Thorpe Cloud. Now it was our holiday, so we decided to climb it in the daytime and not at sunrise!

On a cold, cloudy but dry January day, we parked in Dovedale Car Park, and looked up at Thorpe Cloud. As we climbed, I remembered the two groves of trees on the hilltop in David's photo. And I saw two groves of trees above the line of the car park and kept photographing them. It wasn't until we started to turn and go around the back side of the hill and I spotted more tree groves on the tops of other hills, that it occurred to me that I might have been looking in the wrong direction. As we got round to the back side of the hill, the path started to get steeper. And the view more expansive. Near the top, it was not as well marked and there were several very steep options, but puffing and panting we reached the rock at the top of the hill. Words from the Psalms about God as our rock and refuge sprang to mind. And I finally figured out which direction David was looking as he took his sunrise photo.

Now David told me that he had the mountain to himself with peace and quiet and just the sounds of nature. We did not! We had a parade of people. It was a communal experience, as our faith life often is, with people offering encouragement, talking and laughing. There was a large group of young adults enjoying themselves. We spoke to a couple who shared their story of where they were from and why they were climbing Thorpe Cloud. They kindly let me take their photo as they posed at the top of the rock outcrop, which reminded me of the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus where the disciples saw Jesus with Elijah and Moses.

Then, I saw one most surprising and unexpected thing. And it really spoke to me. In that shot that David took was something that I had not noticed or perceived. On the far ridge where the sun rises is a wind farm. Here, in amongst God's beautiful creation, with a 360 degree view, is a sign of the future. A sign of the God-given creativity of humans.

A sign of God and humans working together. A sign of hope. A sign of God doing a new thing. A sign of not clinging to the past, but of moving into the future. It was a beautiful walk and time to praise God, and a reminder to let go of my preconceived ideas, and to lean into God's plans.

When Mary went to the tomb on that first Easter morning, she did not find what she expected; instead the tomb was empty. As she turns around and sees a man she supposes to be a gardener, he asks her '**who are you looking for?**' Mary is looking for a body. Mary finds what she is not looking for. Jesus is alive. And Mary must have given him a big hug, because Jesus then says, 'do not hold onto me' or in some translations 'do not cling to me.' Hanging or clinging onto the way things were can stop us moving forward into a better future. Isaiah says: *don't remember the former things. I am doing a new thing and it's about to happen. Can you perceive it?*

We all have our expectations as to how we expect God to be working in the world. And sometimes we are looking at the wrong things. We look at how God has worked in the past and expect God to do exactly the same thing again. But we serve a God of resurrection. A God that does surprising things in new ways. If you are now in a place of deep darkness, know that God is with you, and that resurrection is coming and that new life will spring forth. God is up to something. Can you begin to perceive it? As I think about our world and everything that is happening in it at the moment, especially the injustices, I can be filled with despair. What am I looking for? Well, knowing that Jesus came to bring us salvation, deliverance from sin, healing and wholeness, and new life; I am looking for hope for the future. I don't want the future to look like the past. It has to be better. It has to be just. I'm looking for a green economy, a fairer economy, a world where all can have jobs that pay fair wages and offer basic social protections, and one where we don't pit one group of people facing injustice against another.

I perceive that God is already doing a new thing. I see the signs when I climb to Thorpe Cloud and see a wind farm. I see the signs when I see young people advocating for change and when there are mass protests and people coming together to advocate for justice. I am grateful to the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and their detailed reports as they help us to see what we need to do to stop global warming and I celebrate the progress that has been made and I heed their words that there is still a long way to go. I see many more churches beginning to take action and make changes and help to educate us all. I give thanks for the Eco Church movement of *A Rocha* that sets eco standards for congregational life and for church buildings and encourages churches to get those awards; and for the work of the Methodist Church with its concern for Social Justice and programs dealing with Racism, Poverty and Climate. My social media feeds are full of news about latest inventions that will get us closer to net-zero emissions; I never ceased to be amazed by women and men's ingenuity. All of our choices have an impact on the earth as well as our own personal finances. We have always been told to love our neighbour, but as we ask 'who is our neighbour?' we are now beginning to realize that includes what is good for the whole earth.

So how about you? How are you *Rising to the Call*? What are you looking for? Where do you find hope? Can you perceive God doing a new thing? Our God of resurrection is making all things new. A new heaven and earth. A new way of thinking and of being. Hope is breaking out with life where we least expect it. And may we rise to the call and be bearers of that resurrection light to others.

Prayers

O God of Resurrection hope, with shouts of acclamation we proclaim that Christ is risen. We give thanks that you are about to do a new thing. Help us to look for it and to recognise it and not cling to our former ideas. Open us, like tombs giving way to your light. Open us, to your possibilities, to your word, to your surprises, to your love, to your grace, to your risen presence. Risen Lord, hear our cry for help, as this week we pray for ... *lift up your concerns for creation and the world ... Our Father ...*

Hymn: STF 313 *Thine be the Glory* (Edmond Bundry; Trans. Richard Birch Hoyle)

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:

Blessing:

Go from here rising to the call to live as God's resurrected people, inspiring and seeking hope for the world. May God the Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer be with you now and evermore. Amen.