



# "Open minds"

A service of reflection for Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## Introduction

We continue in the Easter season to reflect on the risen life of Jesus. In a doubting and difficult world the Scriptures invite us to keep "open minds" to see God at work in fresh ways.

## Hymn: At the name of Jesus (*Singing the Faith* 317)

We might remember singing this at school and join in our heads with other singers!

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 At the name of Jesus<br>every knee shall bow,<br>every tongue confess him<br>King of Glory now.<br>'Tis the Father's pleasure<br>we should call him Lord,<br>who from the beginning<br>was the mighty Word. | to the Father's breast ;<br>filled it with the glory<br>of that perfect rest.   |
| 2 Humbled for a season,<br>to receive a name<br>from the lips of sinners<br>unto whom he came,<br>faithfully he bore it<br>spotless to the last,<br>brought it back victorious<br>when from death he passed : | 4 In your hearts enthrone him ;<br>there let him subdue<br>all that is not holy,<br>all that is not true ;<br>crown him as your captain<br>in temptation's hour :<br>let his will enfold you<br>in its light and power. |
| 3 Bore it up triumphant<br>with its human light,<br>through all ranks of creatures<br>to the central height,<br>to the throne of Godhead,   | 5 For this same Lord Jesus<br>shall return again,<br>with his Father's glory,<br>with his angel train ;<br>all the wreaths of empire<br>meet upon his brow,<br>and our hearts confess him<br>King of Glory now.         |
- Caroline Maria Noel (1817–1877)

## Prayer

Lord God, whose arms are always open to us, we come before you today with hearts and minds open to receive your teaching.

Lead us to understand who you are and what you have done, and what you require of us as witnesses. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

## Bible passage Luke 24: 36b-48 Jesus Appears to His Disciples

<sup>36</sup> While the two were telling them this, suddenly the Lord himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."<sup>[a]</sup><sup>37</sup> They were terrified, thinking they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup> But he said to them, "Why are you alarmed? Why are these doubts coming up in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet, and see it is I myself. Feel me, and you will know, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as I have."

<sup>40</sup> He said this and showed them his hands and his feet.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>41</sup> They still could not believe, they were so full of joy and wonder'. So he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of cooked fish, <sup>43</sup> which he took and ate in their presence.

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, "These are the very things I told you about while I was still with you: everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms had to come true." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, "This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three

days later, <sup>47</sup> and in his name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.

### **Reflection: "Open Minds"**

Open minds are not something small towns are known for and as I come from a small town, I know this very well. My home town is called, rather unimaginatively, Newcastle. There are 32 other places in the world called Newcastle, five of which are in the UK. From the 1960s onwards, my Newcastle was made up of the usual Northern Irish mix of locally focused Protestants and Catholics. We had a fish and chip shop and the odd café and when a Chinese restaurant started in the 1970s the people I knew were generally very rude about it. Today we would say their rude comments were racist. I don't know how that restaurant survived, nor how the people who ran it managed for they clearly were not made welcome. We were not a very culturally open-minded small town.

Then in the early 1980s a colossal mistake was made. A group of Chinese students from Hong Kong arrived to study in my Newcastle. We had a technical college, nothing very large, but they arrived to study, having thought they were going to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. But there it was. They were stuck now in my home town. And the local townspeople were a little uneasy. I can't say I knew many people with minds open to welcome this group of Chinese people but perhaps the fact they were younger helped a little. And soon some of these young people started to approach my Presbyterian church because it had a badminton court and club and they liked to play. And gradually, perhaps grudgingly at first, the young people were accepted in. My mum, who was club secretary, started to talk about people with rather different names from our usual friends and associates. In time most of the young people moved on but some settled and started families in Newcastle, Northern Ireland. The town began to change and people from Hong Kong and China and other parts of the world were seen differently.

We all like to think that what we know about people and things is how it is. There have been a few things like mobile phones and email I thought would never catch on! Song writer Graham Kendrick has said that when he first played his hymn "Shine Jesus Shine" to a friend, he was told "No that will never work!". Life can be very surprising though, as can people in particular.

We are told the people around Jesus were extremely shocked and surprised by the events after his death. No one had seen Easter coming! Our Bible story today picks up on the two disciples who, on the third day after Jesus' death, encountered a stranger on the road to Emmaus. When they had shared bread with him they realised that it was Jesus. They dashed back to tell the other disciples and they too had a story to share of Jesus having appeared to Peter. Then we are told of an amazing experience this group of disciples shared together when Jesus appeared to them. At first they thought they saw a ghost but gradually they became more and more confident it was Jesus.

The passage speaks of their range of emotions: startled, fearful, amazed and joyful. It also tells of their thinking, with doubts and still not believing being mentioned. These disciples are invited to give Jesus something to eat and offered more evidence for their senses. And then they are given a job to do. They are commissioned. They are to be witnesses and to preach repentance and forgiveness.

And some of them did just that, otherwise we would not be here today to share the story. So despite their roller-coaster of emotions and all their doubts and fears, they must have kept open minds. And open hearts. And to have found in the risen Jesus someone upon whom they could base the rest of their risk-taking lives. They were changed by the experiences into which our Bible passages try give us some insight.

What about us? Do we have open minds about God and Jesus? We are human beings so we may well have a range of emotions and a whole range of thinking – doubts, disbelieving and yet, yet..... here we are because we are still finding something in Jesus and are still open to him. Roger Gray, a member of the Iona community, has rightly pointed out that “Walking on water is no more miraculous than walking on earth. The resurrection of the dead is no more miraculous than the birth of a child.”

So where do we encounter Jesus today? What proof do we have? That is a question we might each answer differently. Some of us will encounter Jesus most clearly through the Scriptures. Others will find him most vividly in the breaking of bread, wherever and however that happens. Still others will encounter Christ in the amazing forgiving generosity of people we know who love him and serve him.

Let’s think about the question of where we encounter Christ as we sing or read our next song.

**Hymn: The Lord’s my shepherd I’ll not want** (*Singing the Faith* 481)

- 1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want ;  
he makes me lie in pastures green,  
he leads me by the still, still waters,  
his goodness restores my soul.  
*And I will trust in you alone,  
and I will trust in you alone,  
for your endless mercy follows me,  
your goodness will lead me home.*
- 2 He guides my ways in righteousness,  
and he anoints my head with oil ;  
and my cup — it overflows with joy,  
I feast on his pure delights.
- 3 And though I walk the darkest path —  
I will not fear the evil one,  
for you are with me, and your rod and staff  
are the comfort I need to know.

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

**Prayer:**

Lord God who has called us to faith, in faith we pray for the needs of others.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

Today, we pray for our Queen, who has ruled for as long as many of us can remember, and longer than many of us have lived. In her loss and her grief may she find comfort in the companionship of others, support from family and friends, and strength in her faith in God and life eternal.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

For all who grieve for the loss of loved ones, family or friends, near or far away. Especially those who are bereaved a long way from family who can’t travel to be with them to offer comfort and support. In their loss, in their grief, in their solitude may they find a calm centre and be upheld by their faith, their friendship and their neighbours.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

For those whose bodies are ravaged by pain and illness, by disfigurement and disability. For those fearful of treatment and those waiting for treatment.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

We pray for those of faith and those of no faith, for those with purpose and those with no purpose in life. For those who have a clear direction and those who flounder uncertain for life in all its complexities. For those whose mental health causes them pain, anguish, confusion and loneliness, for those who feel abandoned, unwanted, unloved and un-helped.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

For countries at war with other countries and within themselves; for their people who fear for their lives and stability; for those made homeless and jobless and offered nothing but an uncertain future; for those countries where violence comes all too easily to the fore and

where it is hard to grasp the real reason behind it. We remember countries at war where their people are damaged, isolated, abused; for Myanmar, Ethiopia, Mozambique and closer to home for the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland; for Catholics and Protestants; those of faith and those of none.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

For countries with surging Covid cases - for those with poor infrastructure and resources, for countries with little PPE and no vaccines and no realistic prospect of national immunisation any time soon. For those engaged in trying to resolve such issues no matter what faith, colour, creed. It is their need that needs to be met along with providing sufficient food and housing, safety and stability.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

For ourselves - we pray our ears may be used to hear the cries of the needy; our eyes used to see the needs around us; our voices used to speak up for the marginalised and the poor; our hands used to reach out in comfort and our lives used to improve the lives of others.

For the world and its people, **Lord, we pray.**

**Amen.**

**Hymn: Community of Christ** (Tune Leoni - to which we sing "Praise to the living God")

- 1           Community of Christ,  
          who make the Cross your own,  
          live out your creed and risk your life  
          for God alone :  
          the God who wears your face,  
          to whom all worlds belong,  
          whose children are of every race  
          and every song.
- 2           Community of Christ,  
          look past the Church's door  
          and see the refugee, the hungry,  
          and the poor.  
          Take hands with the oppressed,  
          the jobless in your street,  
          take towel and water, that you wash  
          your neighbour's feet.
- 3           Community of Christ,  
          through whom the word must sound —  
          cry out for justice and for peace  
          the whole world round :  
          disarm the powers that war  
          and all that can destroy,  
          turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish  
          into joy.
- 4           When menace melts away,  
          so shall God's will be done,  
          the climate of the world be peace  
          and Christ its Sun ;  
          our currency be love  
          and kindness our law,  
          our food and faith be shared as one  
          for evermore

Shirley Erena Murray (b. 1931)

### **Blessing**

May you go with the blessing of God the Father, to witness to Jesus the Son and be empowered by the Holy Spirit, today and always. **Amen.**

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