**Westfield URC Easter Sunday 10.30am 4th April 2021**

**Call to worship** 1 Cor. 15

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we of all men most miserable – BUT NOW IS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

Christ is risen.. Hallelujah.. risen indeed.

**Hymn M.P. 76 Christ the Lord is risen today.**

Christ the Lord is risen today; *hallelujah!*

sons of men and angels say: *hallelujah!*

raise your joys and triumphs high; *hallelujah!*

sing, ye heavens; thou earth, reply: *hallelujah!*

Love's redeeming work is done, *hallelujah!*

fought the fight, the battle won; *hallelujah!*

Lo! our sun's eclipse is o'er, *hallelujah!*

Lo! He sets in blood no more: *hallelujah!*

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; *hallelujah!*

Christ hath burst the gates of hell; *hallelujah!*

death in vain forbids Him rise; *hallelujah!*

Christ hath opened paradise; *hallelujah!*

Lives again our glorious King; *hallelujah!*

where, O death, is now thy sting? *hallelujah!*

Once He died our souls to save; *hallelujah!*

where thy victory, 0 grave? *hallelujah!*

Soar we now where Christ hath led, *hallelujah!*

following our exalted Head; *hallelujah!*

made like Him, like Him we rise; *hallelujah!*

ours the cross, the grave, the skies: *hallelujah!*

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, *hallelujah!*

praise to Thee by both be given: *hallelujah!*

Thee we greet, in triumph sing *hallelujah!*

Hail, our resurrected King: *hallelujah!*

Charles Wesley (1707 - 88) CCLI 150801

**Prayers of Praise and Worship**

This special morning, Father, we bring our prayers of praise and worship.. for we

worship you the One true, and living God. We praise You for this day.. this day of

newness of life, this day of triumph.. this Easter day.

We praise You for Christ is risen.. has conquered death and is now seated at the Father’s right hand. Death could not defeat Him, the tomb could not hold Him.. Jesus is alive.. and because He lives, we also, who trust in Him have a newness of life.. made to become sons of the living God.. our sins forgiven, our names written in the Lamb’s Book of life.. an anticipation of being part of the Bride of Christ, of participating in the marriage supper of the Lamb and of ruling and reigning with Him for an eternity that defies description.. blessed be His name, Father accept our praise and worship this morning in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**O.T Reading** Psalm 16

Notices, Mission Prayer and Dedication of Offering.

**Hymn M.P. 689 Thine be the glory**

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:

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,

endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won.

No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of Life;

life is nought 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:

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,

endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won.

EDMOND BUDRY (1854-1932) CCLI 150801

**Communion**

What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that You visit him.. yet,

Father, You have been mindful of us and You have visited us with Your salvation.. and so we come this morning in remembrance of the cost of our salvation.. we come in gratitude and with great rejoicing for Christ is risen.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord.

1 Cor. 11:23-28

Let us come, this resurrection morning.. in remembrance.. with gratitude and with great rejoicing:-

“We take the bread” Take, eat this in remembrance of Him who loved you and gave Himself to redeem you.

“We take the cup” In remembrance of the One who said “I shall not eat of this bread or drink of this cup until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.

The covenant of sins forgiven and the promise of a banquet to come.. we drink the cup together.

MESSAGE - THE APOSTLES CREED No 7

This is perhaps the most important of all our studies on the Apostles Creed, because: “If Christ be not risen we are still dead in our sins, and that which we believe and preach is just a fabrication and of no effect whatsoever.”

IF it is true then it is the supreme fact of history, and to fail to adjust one’s life to its implications means irreparable loss… if it is not true then the whole of Christianity is a fraud. (This is a sermon with response.. eg. Sometimes in prayers the minister will say “Lord in Your mercy”… and the response is “Hear our prayers”… this time the call is “The stone was rolled away.. the body was not there.. Christ is risen.. Hallelujah”.. and the response is “Christ is risen. Hallelujah!”

Illustration:- a missionary and a Buddhist friend were witnessing a great religious parade in India. A bone of the Buddha had been found and was being presented to the city with fanatical fervour, thousands prostrated themselves before the sacred object, bowing themselves in the dust. The missionary turned to his friend and said; “What a striking difference there is between our two faiths.. if any part of the body of Jesus was to be found it would cause not a rejoicing but utter dismay for it would show that He had not risen from the dead.” But the stone was rolled away.. the body was not there.. Christ is risen.. Hallelujah!

I want to consider the witnesses of this great event and what they had to say:-

The Women (Mark 16:1-6)

The stories vary from witness to witness in different gospels.. but this is the stuff actual events are made of.. Illustration:- Police Sergeant (Bobby Baker) told me that if 4 people witness an accident he will have 4 different stories.. these gospel writers wrote what they remembered and it was not altered.. So, what happened to the body?

THE SWOON THEORY

Not worth the paper it’s written on.. states that Christ was not really dead but only swooned and the coolness of the tomb revived Him.

1. The romans knew a dead body when they saw one.. they were skilled executioners.. saw no need for the crucifragium (4x2 plank used to break the legs of the condemned so that they could not lift themselves up to draw breath.. and so died of asphyxiation.)

Mk. 15:37 And Jesus cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost.

He gave up the ghost voluntarily.. Satan could gain no satisfaction in His death. He was not killed.. He died of his own volition.. He was ever the master of the situation.. Pilate was surprised He had died so quickly.

Mark 15:43-45

And the centurion bears witness that Christ was dead.. he knew a dead body when he saw one. The spear thrust into His heart would have settled the matter anyway.. and could a man, beaten, bloodied and exhausted (could tell all his bones) move the stone.. from the inside (no hand holds).. this stone that the women were worried about.. and then this living corpse walk 5 miles to Emmaus and the disciples didn’t notice?????

Jesus was dead and buried and the swoon theory doesn’t hold up any way whatsoever.

But the stone WAS rolled away.. the body was not there.. Christ is risen. Hallelujah!

THE STOLEN THEORY

Here there must be some possibilities.. there are the disciples.. the priests and officials and Joseph and Nicodemus.

1. THE DISCIPLES.

If the disciples had moved the body, the women would have surely known.. but the disciples had fled.. the end of the dream. (We thought it would be he, that would deliver Israel.).. they were going back fishing.. they had no concept of a resurrection. Then there was the guard to stop such. Matthew 27:62-64

And if they had stolen the body would they then have been so changed.. preaching boldly.. being arrested and killed.. all on a lie.. He was definitely not taken by the disciples.

1. WHAT ABOUT JOSEPH AND NICODEMUS?

It was, after all Joseph’s tomb.. newly cut and cost a lot.. maybe he had changed his mind.. but that was what the guard was there to stop.. and would they have undressed the corpse.. and carried it away to wherever.. it doesn’t stand up.

1. WHAT ABOUT THE OFFICIALS?

The guards would have allowed this.. but we read that they fled and were bribed to say the disciples had taken the body.. when the disciples acknowledged He had risen and began to preach the resurrection, many accepted the truth.. the city was in turmoil.. just what the Priests had feared.. all they had to do to scotch the story was to produce the corpse.. but they could not because..

The stone was rolled away, the body was not there.. Christ is risen. Hallelujah!

What was there were the grave clothes John 20:1-8

The stone was rolled away, the body was not there.. Christ is risen. Hallelujah!

What about this stone.. Matthew tells us:- Matt. 28:1-10

The stone was rolled away to give clear evidence of His victory over death and the grave clothes, now no longer required showed His complete and utter triumph. The greatest evidence was the change that took place in the disciples, once fearful, frightened, running away, meeting in secret.. now they are preaching the Gospel with boldness.. now they are willing to lay down their lives because they KNOW that Jesus is alive and has risen from the dead.. He appears to them in a locked and barred room.. shows them His hands and feet.. He has now a resurrected, glorified, transformed body.. and we shall inherit the same.. for when we see Him. We shall be like Him.. this mortal shall put on immortality and this corruptible shall put on in-corruption.

Finally:- Paul speaks to King Agrippa, witnessing to him of the resurrection says:- Acts 26:26

Peter says:- 2 Peter 1:16

This is not some fancy fairy tale.. some elaborate plot.. some religious fanatics wish.. this is for real.. the evidence is clear and stands up to the closest scrutiny.

The stone was rolled away, the body was not there.. Christ is risen. Hallelujah!

And to Him shall the glory be.. both now and forever.

“I believe the third day He rose from the dead.”

**Shine join to share what they have been doing**

**Hymn M.P. 52 Because He lives**

God sent His Son, they called him Jesus;

He came to love, heal, and forgive;

He lived and died to buy my pardon,

an empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives.

 *Because He lives I can face tomorrow*

 *because He lives all fear is gone;*

 *because I know He holds the future,*

 *and life is worth the living just because He lives.*

How sweet to hold a new-born baby,

and feel the pride and joy he gives;

but greater still the calm assurance,

this child can face uncertain days because He lives.

 *Because He lives...*

And then one day I’ll cross the river;

and fight life’s final war with pain;

and then as death gives way to victory,

I’ll see the lights of glory and I’ll know He lives.

 *Because He lives...*

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**Benediction**

May God, the source of our hope, fill you with all joy and peace and may your faith in the Son continue to grow, until at last, we stand before Him and worship Him, for evermore. Amen.