

## **Easter Morning 2020 Running Order**

### **Lighting the Candle**

Alleluia, Christ is Risen  
**He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia**

### **Opening Prayer**

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.

### **First hymns: Jesus Christ is Risen Today**

### **Reading John 20:1-18**

In our reading, Mary meets the risen Jesus. It's a moment full of mixed emotions. She's gone to visit the tomb, as many people do – especially at certain dates and times. Perhaps she wanted to cement in her own mind that Jesus had really gone. When I was a curate we had a churchyard that was still in use, and many people used to come to visit and tend the graves of loved ones – especially at significant dates.

As John tells us the story of Mary Magdalene discovering the empty tomb, we witness an extraordinary range of emotion. Finding a grave open is the stuff of horror stories, so it's no surprise that she runs to get help. Peter and John return with her and go in and confirm the grave is empty. Mary weeps outside. Despair at what had happened, fear about where the body has gone; bewilderment about what it all means. Then when they have gone, she has the surprise encounter with the 'gardener' who turns out to be Jesus risen from the dead. We see the fear – or perhaps awe - and joy about Jesus being risen, and perhaps a sense of wanting to prolong the moment by holding on. But the moment can't be extended, and letting go must have been its own kind of loss. Mary has to go and find the other disciples and to tell them.

A couple of weeks ago I had a Twitter exchange with a friend because I had referred to the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in John chapter 11 (which was the reading for 29 March) as a resuscitation. I think he may have been concerned that I was questioning whether Lazarus was actually dead – and people have over the years. We agreed that raising Lazarus was a better term.

I was trying to draw a contrast between Lazarus being restored to life and the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus was restored to his biological life – he was back with his family and friends. When a loved one dies it would be very natural to long to have them back, restored to health and life. That's particularly true when someone dies at an age when we might have expected to have had them for much longer.

But here's the difference. At some point later, Lazarus would die. If they were still around, his sisters Mary and Martha would grieve again, and he would be buried again. In that sense when Jesus raises Lazarus, it is a temporary or provisional solution. The gift will only last for a time – perhaps quite a few years – but it would end. Death is postponed, not defeated

What Christians believe and celebrate today is that resurrection is a permanent change to a different kind of existence and life which is free from the perils and timescales of this world. It's a mystery how that works, and we can't really imagine what it will be like.

The Gospels give us several occasions when Mary Magdalene, the 11 remaining disciples, and others encountered the resurrected Jesus, but they are limited in number and only for a short period. They are a sign of what is promised and are a hope for us all. The resurrection is, in many ways, one of the most difficult things to believe, and it caused great controversy even when it was first preached in the book of Acts soon after the event.

The hope of resurrection isn't a quick fix – it doesn't bring people back, and it involves a letting go – even Mary had to let go of Jesus and all his followers had to let go of the earthly appearances at what we call the Ascension. But it is a lasting hope, of death defeated, and of a new restored and transformed life where all that is good and loving and true endures

## **Prayers**

Loving and gracious God,  
We thank you for the good news of Easter,  
of Jesus risen from the dead, of death defeated,  
And of a promise of life with you for all.  
We pray that today will bring hope to your world  
To all who grieve  
To all who live in fear and anxiety  
To all whose lives are fragile or uncertain

We pray especially this morning, in these strange circumstances for

- All who are suffering from coronavirus
- All who work in health and care services – doing all of their normal work in a new context, and facing a much greater challenge as result of the infection
- All who work to supply the essentials of life – in our shops, supply chain, deliveries and services.
- All who make key decisions about our and other nations response
- All who live in locations with scarce resources and in challenging environments.
- All who research, seeking treatments and vaccines
- All who mourn and those who offer assistance support and care in their loss.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

**Second Hymn:           Thine Be The Glory**

**The Blessing.**