

IS JESUS DEAD?

Call to Worship: (Psalm 37:5-6)

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Worship in song: by John SB Monsell (MHB 206 T: Morgenlied)

1. Christ is risen! Hallelujah! Risen our victorious Head!
Sing His praises! Hallelujah! Christ is risen from the dead!
Gratefully our hearts adore Him, as His light once more appears,
Bowing down in joy before Him, rising up from grief and tears,
Christ is risen! Hallelujah! Risen our victorious Head!
Sing His praises! Hallelujah! Christ is risen from the dead!
2. Christ is risen! all the sadness of His earthly life is o'er,
Through the open gates of gladness He returns to life once more;
Death and hell before Him bending, He doth rise, the Victor now,
Angels on His steps attending, glory round His wounded brow.
3. Christ is risen! henceforth never death or hell shall us enthrall;
We are Christ's, in Him forever we have triumphed over all;
All the doubting and dejection of our trembling hearts have ceased,
'Tis His day of resurrection! Let us rise and keep the feast.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 25:1-14

Prayer of confession

Loving Father,

It amazes us that you should choose to entrust us with your truth.

When we tried to find meaning and invoke the favour of an unknown God,
you came and revealed yourself as Jesus.

Forgive us when we have not honoured this.

Loving Father,

It amazes us that you should choose to share your love.

When we ached for significance and looked for meaning and value,
you came as Christ and showed your love on a cross.

Forgive us for being careless of your love.

Loving Father,

It amazes us that you should choose to work out your purpose through us, your church.

When we wondered at our reason for living,
you empowered us with your spirit to do your mission.

Forgive us Father when we have shrunk from this call.

Amen.

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Assurance of forgiveness

*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the (one) whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit
is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning, all my
strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"
- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Ps 32:1-5)*

Prayer of thanksgiving

Holy God, we honour you for the life we have in Christ.
Born of Mary, he shares our life.
Eating with sinners, he welcomes us.
Leading his followers, he guides us.
Dying on the cross, he rescues us.
Rising from the dead, he gives us new life.

We ask that you refresh us with your Holy Spirit, that we, your people, may be

- inspired to love
- empowered to serve,
- and encouraged with hope,

so we may be united in faith as we minister your love to the world,
until Christ comes in final victory.

Holy Communion

Luke 22:15 records Jesus saying that he had eagerly looked forward to sharing the last supper with his disciples. According to Luke, the meal that they shared was the Passover meal which meant that during the meal they would have sung some of the Hallel Psalms (Psalms of praise) including Psalm 118 which has the words: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." The fact that Jesus could look forward to this meal and sing this song knowing he was about to die points to the level of commitment he had to doing his Father's will and his joy at his Father rescuing humanity back to himself.

Jesus wanted no one to miss out. In Matthew 26:27, Jesus says "Drink this, all of you". At the last supper recorded by John, Jesus linked it with washing the disciples feet. When he did this, Peter objected but Jesus insisted strongly that unless Peter let Jesus wash him, he could not be with Jesus. By saying this, Jesus was not only teaching us to be servants to each other but was also making it plain that all of us have to allow Jesus to wash us clean of sin. No one should miss out. Jesus was pointing to the fact that he was about to shed his blood on the cross to pay for the sins of all people so that they are made right with God. He wanted everyone to share in this act of rescue.

(Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine which is the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the bread and wine together.)

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The Bible Reading

- Luke 24:1-8

The Message:

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Why do you look for what is alive among those who are indisputably dead? Did you expect the Christ of history to be dead? Did you think that Jesus was safely entombed in a sarcophagus between two brass candles amidst Gothic architecture of a cathedral, surrounded by mournful people singing Victorian hymns? Is the Jesus you look for dead?

Didn't you think Jesus was dead? Surely, cynicism has killed him off. The Enlightenment has dispelled all mystery. All men must die. Jesus is a man. Jesus must die. Jesus has been dead for centuries... hasn't he?

Is Jesus no more than an absurd, and slightly embarrassing Easter story, a folk story? It is part of your culture but not part of your belief. It is part of your heritage, but not part of your heart. Your real Jesus lies amongst the dead. That's where you have put him, and that's where you expect to find him.

And so you remain, terribly alone and without hope. Any thought that God existed died long ago. Any thought that the God of the universe would seek our love to such an extent that he would come to us, is dead. Hope died on the cross. Jesus, although he gave us a good moral example, failed. He was just one of hundreds of thousands who have died nobly in history. And so humankind is still left floundering and lost amidst the confusion of religions and impossible acts of piety we design to try and make ourselves worthy of a holy God. God is still distant, confusing and unknowable, hiding behind the masks of a thousand different religions... or maybe, he does not exist at all.

Jesus is dead.

We should all join the disciples, embarrassed at what we had believed and hoped for, bewildered and grieving over the beginnings of a truth which we have now lost. Let's all hide behind closed doors huddled together, fearful, not believing and not engaging with the world. And so it seems to be. The church is dead, populated by old people who like stained glass windows and ancient culture – not engaging with the world.

Jesus is dead. The church is dead. Hope is dead. Give up, discard God... or call yourself God. It's not much, but its delusions might lend you some comfort.

Then a group of women get up early to do some fairly unsavoury work. (That's how we know it was the women!) Jesus had been hurriedly anointed and wrapped in burial bandages in order to get his body out of the way so people could get on and celebrate the Saturday Sabbath religious obligations. Now, the women came two days later to finish the job. They came with heavy hearts, for their world was shattered. Their Jesus was dead. They went to find the corpse. When they left for the tomb on that first Easter Sunday morning they knew what awaited them at the end of their journey. Or so they thought.

These women were looking for Jesus among the dead. But amazingly, wonderfully, incomprehensibly, they encountered Jesus – alive. They expected

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death, but encountered life. Why did you come here today? Did you come to hear about a man who lived a good life and died a noble death?

Have you not heard the news? In case you missed it let me repeat it: Jesus is alive! He rose from the dead. He is with us today. Not only that, but Jesus has the ability to raise you from the grave.

Jesus is with us now, albeit in a veiled form that is seen only by the eye of faith. But there will come a time when God will make all things new, and we will see him face to face.

Is your life, like that of the women that morning, a slow walk towards death? If so, let me tell you that Jesus also has the power to transform your 'wait for death' into something glorious, a 'wait for eternal life'. He can take your grief, meaninglessness and mortality... and give you new life.

Jesus is not dead. He is alive. His resurrection is the greatest demonstration of who Jesus is. We are not talking about some sort of resuscitation of someone who must still eventually die; we are talking about a resurrected Jesus whom the Father rose to life with a new everlasting form, to show us that we too can follow Jesus in our resurrected form into the presence of God. Nothing else other than the outrageous event of Jesus' resurrection could have convinced us.

Jesus' resurrection was the transcendent crack across the totality of human experience. As Bishop John Robinson said:

"Before Jesus died, the line was drawn between those who were dead and those who were alive. After Jesus' resurrection, the line was drawn between those who were 'in Christ' and those who were not. That was the only thing now that mattered for eternity."

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, the grave is not the final reality of human experience.

In the Louvre Museum in Paris, there is a dramatic painting based upon Goethe's Faust. (Faust sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for 24 years of pleasure¹). Faust is seated at a table playing a game of chess against Mephistopheles, the devil of medieval legend. The devil is grinning smugly. A look at the chessboard tells why. It appears he has the victory and so he is gloating. You can almost hear him shouting, "Checkmate! Game over. I have won!" However, word has it that several years ago, an internationally known chess player was looking at the painting when all of the sudden he shouted, "Wait! Look! Faust has another move that will give him the victory!"

That happened when God the Father moved Jesus from death to life. He's won the game. Which side do you want to be on?

¹ Johann Wolfgang Goethe wrote the tragedy of Faust at the end of the 18th century.

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Hymn: by Keith & Kristyn Getty

1. How can it be, the One who died has borne our sin through sacrifice
To conquer every sting of death? Sing, sing hallelujah.
2. For joy awakes as dawning light when Christ's disciples lift their eyes.
Alive He stands, their Friend and King; Christ, Christ He is risen.
Christ is risen, He's risen indeed! Oh, sing hallelujah!
Join the chorus, sing with the redeemed: Christ is risen, He's risen indeed.
3. Where doubt and darkness once had been they saw Him and their hearts believed.
But blessed are those who have not seen, yet sing hallelujah
4. Once bound by fear now bold in faith, they preached the truth and power of grace.
And pouring out their lives they gained life, life everlasting.
Refrain
5. The power that raised Him from the grave now works in us to powerfully save.
He frees our hearts to live His grace; go tell of His goodness!
Refrain

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Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship ...we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. (Rom 8:15,17)

This service was prepared by Rev Dr Nick Hawkes for HopeNet SA. He provided HNSA with a suite of services for our use about six months ago.

ADDENDA

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sliced bread

Mark 14:12-17,22-24

You will need:

- 1) A large iced fruit bun. This should be wrapped up and labelled "Jesus loaf".
- 2) A role of cling-film or brown paper.

Ask the children what would happen if they never ate anything. Hopefully, they will answer that you would die. Mention that each of us have to eat if we are going to live.

We have to eat food if we are going to live physically. However, Jesus said that we will have to eat spiritual food if we are going to live spiritually. (Living spiritually means enjoying God's love both now and in heaven after we die.)

What is that spiritual bread we need to feed on in order to live forever with God?

Read John 6:47-51 to discover that Jesus is that spiritual bread.

Jesus said that he was going to give up his body to die in our place and pay the price for our sins. Everyone now needs to accept Christ's death for them if they want to live with God eternally. This is why Jesus called himself the "bread of life" (Jn 6:48).

Go on to say that at a Jewish Passover feast, some bread was usually hidden. This was to represent the Messiah who had yet to be revealed. However, Jesus was the Messiah. He was no longer hidden. As such we had better find the missing loaf of bread.

Invite the children to search for the missing iced fruit loaf. (You will have hidden this somewhere earlier.)

When it is found, invite all the children to share in the "Jesus Loaf". (Please check first that there are no dietary reasons why the children should not do so.) Tell the children that the fruit loaf represents the body of Jesus. Jesus gave his body so all of us could live spiritually.

Continue to teach that as we have all shared in Jesus' body, we become united together in Christ.

Invite the children to stand together, squashed up in line like slices of bread. Then wrap them up together like a parcel with cling-film or brown paper. (Note, wrap them up around at arm height only. This is both safe and will allow the children to have the fun of trying to walk together. Have some scissors handy to cut them loose quickly if any child is not enjoying it.) Finish by declaring that if we have accepted Christ, we belong together as his church.