

Call to Worship:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all things? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is there to condemn us? For Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that was raised to life, is at the right hand of God—and He is interceding for us.

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer

Father in heaven through these promises you have made to us, grant us, taking you at your Holy Word, to live free of all fears particularly that of death. That assured of our unbreakable communion with your Son, the Lord of life, may we always rejoice and do the deeds of faith day by day.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Hymn: *by Francis of Assisi*

1. All creatures worship God most high, lift up your voice in earth and sky,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam, thou silver moon with softer gleam,
O Praise Him, oh praise Him
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
2. Dear mother earth, who day by day, unfoldest blessings on our way,
Alleluia, alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, let them God's glory also show ...
3. And everyone, with tender heart, forgiving others, take your part,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, sing praise and cast on God your care....
4. And thou, most kind and gentle death, waiting to hush our final breath,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Thou leadest home the child of God, as Christ before that way hath trod, ...
5. Let all things their Creator bless, and worship God in humbleness,
Alleluia, alleluia!
To God all thanks and praise belong! Join in the everlasting song:
O sing ye, O sing ye,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Scriptures:

- Ecclesiastes 7.1-10
- John 11.17-26
- 1 Thess 4.13-18

Message: Trusting Jesus with our mortality

One of my first memories is seeing a picture in the paper of an important man lying dead (in state, I guess) and then asking my mum what was death? I think it was King George 6th, or it may have been Stalin. She answered that death is what happens when your heart stops beating. I felt troubled by it all, but noticed the corpse was lying in a bed or coffin. I walked out into the bushes surrounding our farmhouse trying to work out about death which I had never heard of before. If it ever comes to me I thought, I simply will not lie down, like that man in the picture, I will hold onto something solid and beat that death thing! Well, childish logic! Things have changed and I understand. Yes, I will beat it, but not my way. It would prove to be all too big for me. My Jesus, our Lord Jesus Christ has and will handle this strange thing called death. It will be all right!

Scripture tells us the Good News: *Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory!"*. Jesus is the Lord of life, He is the resurrection and the life and has won the right and power to bathe the whole of humankind in life. To wrap every soul up into the 'bundle of the living' and to take even the most timid soul into the unspeakable wonders of everlasting life: *'That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."'*ⁱⁱ

As the Lord of life, Jesus, with fixed determination, came to earth to conquer this horror that separates us from the living God. He destroyed two aspects of Death. First, the big one called 'the Second Death' which results in eternal separation from Life and everything good including God Himself. He tidied up the physical part by removing that dangerous part of simple physical death. He drew the sting out of Death and left death as a harmless thing that has little strength. Just enough to cause grief and to stir our hearts to seek Him. But even that useless skin will be destroyed and finished with, in His time.

That's what happened on that great Passover Sabbath when Jesus yielded up His spirit on the cross and said: "it is finished". He had done everything required to present His church innocent and blameless before the face of God. A one sufficient, full, eternal and atoning sacrifice for the shame and guilt of all humanity and for yours too.

Apostle Paul declares it: *"God presented Him as the atoning sacrifice through faith in His blood, in order to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had passed over the sins committed beforehand. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and to justify the one who has faith in Jesus."*

When we let Jesus be our friend and we take him at his word like a trusted friend, death goes out the window. It is no longer a present, powerful or personal spectre. Listen to these promises: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."*ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Keeping His word means guarding that wonderful promise He has made to us and not letting it go.

And let another of His promises thrill you; *“Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”^{iv}*

Jesus turned Death into death. Big ‘D’ into little ‘d’. Jesus reduced Death to death! He took the sting out of it and left it as merely a passing thing. Yes, there is still grief, the measure of love in a sense. But it, death, can do no other damage. It is simply what it was only intended to be – the unthreatening doorway to greater life. And perhaps a leveller which stirs the stubborn heart of man to humble down and, learning helplessness, trust in Jesus, the Saviour.

Life is knowing Jesus and being known of Him. This is the true purpose, to know Jesus and let Him know us. That is hard sometimes, especially where shame lurks but that is how we enter more and more deeply into eternal life, like a newborn snuggles into its life-nourishing mother. Death is separation. Life is true saintliness which is sharing, conversing, heart to heart with our heavenly Father and our elder brother, Jesus. Tell Him everything till He becomes your most trusted confidant.

No wonder the Apostle Paul speaks of life and even (physical) death as something which you as the believer truly command: *“All things are ours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. All of them belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”^v*

During the Jesus Revolution a song that became popular was Bary McGuire’s *“I’m not gonna think about, I’m not gonna talk about, I’m not gonna sing about, anyone but Jesus”*. Barry had discovered the life of trusting Jesus. Why? Because he felt the peace and joy come into his heart. And then practising that love towards those we might have turned away from or who offended us puts our soul on the highway of real life.

If this friendship has dried up for you and you yearn for its renewal, pray this prayer now:

Lord Jesus, please forgive me for ignoring you and walking away from your friendship. It has left me feeling empty and more fearful. I want the peace of knowing I am safe in your care. I repent of my lovelessness and coldness toward you. I long to learn your ways afresh and please you who died in my place and rose for my salvation. I trust your word. Thank you for giving me a fresh start today. Please fill me with your Spirit of peace and joy. Thank you my dear Saviour. Amen

God bless you with His peace!

Hymn: by Mary Peters

1. Through the love of God our Saviour, all will be well.
Free and changeless is his favour, all, all is well.
Precious is the blood that healed us,
perfect is the grace that sealed us,
strong the hand stretched forth to shield us, all must be well.

Trusting Jesus with our mortality

2. Though we pass through tribulation, all will be well.
Ours is such a full salvation, all, all is well.
Happy, still in God confiding, fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
holy, through the Spirit's guiding, all must be well.
3. We expect a bright tomorrow, all will be well.
Faith can sing through days of sorrow, 'All, all is well.'
On our Father's love relying, Jesus every need supplying,
in our living, in our dying, all must be well.

Benediction:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you unblemished in His glorious presence, with great joy—to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all time, and now, and for all eternity.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

ⁱ 1Cor 15.54

ⁱⁱ 1cor 2.9

ⁱⁱⁱ John 8.51

^{iv} John 17.2

^v 1Cor 3.21-23