



You Are Witnesses

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **white or gold** cloth or scarf for this special celebration.*

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.



Video - Jesus Stand Among Us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC16hj3RoXo>

Light Candle

In the darkness before the dawn,
amongst the darkest places of this world,
in the shadows of our own lives,
Jesus the Christ, the risen one, the Light of the World,
breaks in.

Light the candle

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Acknowledgement of Country

In this place,
where the land meets the sea,
where the sea makes a noise,
since time beyond our imagining,
the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have cared for the land and the sea and its creatures great and small.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders.

And we pray for our future together -

there is work to be done to build relationships that honour and respect those for whom this land is embedded in their being.

We commit ourselves to the way of love.

Call to Worship

So you want to see the risen Jesus?

Remember to look in the less likely places:

not in the Temple, but by the lakeside;

not in full view, but hidden in plain sight;

not dining with the rich, but preparing food to share;

not in the centres of power, but always on the margins.

Now come and see!

Opening prayer

Ever-present God, we so much want to know of your transformative spirit among us. Yet, we admit that many times we only stare, mouths gaping and knees trembling, at the sight of your miraculous presence.

Forgive us for when we stand in disbelief.

As we gather once more to ponder the good news of resurrection, fill us with Christ's peace, a deep sense of conviction and joy so we may be your witnesses in our communities.

Gracious God,
help us remember that there is so much more to this world than what our minds can imagine. Let our hearts be open to the everyday miracles that occur all around us.
Amen.

Sing - Here In This Place (TIS 474)

Our song of praise reminds us that here and now, God's light shines amongst us.

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;
gather us in, the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

Here we will take of wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth,
here you shall call your sons and your daughters,
call us anew to be salt of the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you;
nourish us well and teach us to fashion
lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery;
we are the old, who yearn for your face;
we have been sung throughout all of history,
called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,
gather us in, the proud and the strong;
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven light years away,
but here in this space, the new light is shining,
now is the kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in, and hold us forever;
gather us in, and make us your own;
gather us in, all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

© Marty Haugen

Prayer of Praise and Confession

Holy One,
we gather before you this day,
we come to meet you in this time of worship,
we come to meet you in the risen Jesus,
we come to wonder at the resurrection.

We know of the cycle of life and death,
we trust in the truth of life eternal because of the resurrection of Jesus,
because we have met
or hope to meet
the risen Christ ourselves.

God, we are often busy.
We busy ourselves with quick responses and neat appearance.
We get caught in the flow of hectic pace and too quickly give up opportunities
to be still and know you.

God, forgive us when we become so busy we forget to pray.

Forgive us when we are so enthralled by devices and gadgets that we forget to look up and take notice.

We fail to notice our neighbours.

We fail to notice the needs of others.

Forgive us when we are so saturated by the news that we shut down completely, we forget that we are called to be your servants, your witnesses here and now.

We forget that we can do small things, we can do some-thing.

Wake us up to the work of love at hand.

Forgive us when we choose apathy over attention,

when become hyper-vigilant in getting what we want that

we forget to attend with care to those we meet and greet throughout our days;

when we neglect to see the humanity in our fellow companions.

God of life, as you broke through locked doors and frightened hearts,

break into our forgetfulness, our paralysis, our apathy.

Fill us with your peace and send us once more into your world with extravagant love and boundless grace. Amen.

Assurance

Jesus said:

“Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.” (Luke 24:39)

Jesus stands among us now - offering forgiveness, deep peace and life in all its fullness.

Receive the gift he offers, and be thankful. Amen.

Sing - God of Creation (tune: Morning Has Broken (TIS 156))

We sing another song of praise and prayer...

God of Creation,

Gentle life-giver

Present at birth, and

all through our days

Author of sunrise

Song in the night sky

Here in this place, we offer our praise.

Spirit of Comfort

blow through Creation

stir up new life, breathe

peace through our world

Healer of hearts, and

hope for tomorrow

weave all our sorrows into new dawn.

Jesus, Companion

teacher and healer

friend of the grieving,

suffering, the poor

Stand with your people

whisper among us

promise of mercy, goodness for all.

Here we give thanks for

life in its fullness

blessings received

your gifts to us all

Make us a people

filled with compassion

selflessly giving, serving your world.

Craig Mitchell (2017)

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 24:33-49

³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?' ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you —that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Open us to a deeper understanding of you, Risen Christ, as you opened the eyes, hearts and minds of your disciples. And send us into our community, to our friends and family, to our neighbours and the visitors in our town, to bear witness to your love. Amen.

Just over a week ago, a lot of rain fell in these parts - a lot of rain in a very short period of time.

The next morning, there were images all over social media and the *ABC*, *WIN News*, the *Illawarra Mercury* and other local news outlets covered the damage extensively. People told their stories from all sorts of difference perspectives. During the week, Janice and I have both spent time at the Disaster Recovery Centres set up by Service NSW. Here again, people tell their stories to the representatives from various government agencies, to the folk from the Salvation Army, Anglicare and the Red Cross who offer all kinds of practical support, and, from time to time, to the Chaplains.

All of us who were in the area that evening were witnesses to those events in some way.

When something like that happens, we all need to tell our stories; most of the time, we want to tell our stories. And while the overall events of that Friday night / Saturday morning were broadly the same - lots of rain in a short amount of time - the stories are all different, with different nuances, and emphases. Some stories are told through tears, some with a phone out showing pictures, some are told very "matter-of-factly", some are told slowly and deliberately as if the teller is trying to explain something they think no-one else could possibly understand (and, with some stories, we simply can't comprehend what that person has seen, heard, felt, experienced). And while the stories differ in their detail and perspective, each story is meaningful for the person telling it;

each story is precious;
and each story tells us something more, something different, to other stories.

So it is when we read the stories of the resurrection of Jesus and his appearances to the disciples in the days following.

Last week, we heard the story in the gospel attributed to John (John 20:19-31).
Today we hear from the writer of Luke's gospel.

This part of Luke's account is similar in many ways to that of John.
Jesus comes to the disciples in the evening.

In Luke's account, the disciples are in deep conversation with Cleopas and his friend (possibly his wife) who had just returned. They are telling their story of having encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus and shared a meal with him.

As they are talking, Jesus comes amongst them and offers peace.

Still unconvinced, still terrified - is this a ghost? (24:37) - Jesus tries to allay their fears in two very tactile ways: come and touch me (a ghost doesn't have flesh and bone), and let's eat together (a ghost can't eat).

I love how this account describes the disciples as joyful yet disbelieving and still wondering (24:41). Isn't that us, when something happens we never thought could be - kind of like the Wallabies beating New Zealand in the Bledisloe Cup, or when we get to see some wonder of nature we have heard about, maybe even seen on TV, and then we get to see it for real - like the whales breaching off the coast, or the mackerel run, or... you fill in the gap with something that makes you gasp in joy and wonder yet with a tiny bit of disbelief!

Being a witness is not always a choice we make - we happen to be in a particular place at a particular time when something happens - we see something, we experience something, we are a part of something - and then we try to make sense of it.

Jesus, tries to help his disciples make sense of what has happened.

"You are witnesses of these things," he says (24:48).

This is what the Scriptures have said all along (24:44), what I tried to explain to you all along.

And then he opens their minds to understanding, and tells them to stay in the city until what God has promised has come (presumably a reference to the Holy Spirit which in Luke's story comes 50 days later at Pentecost (Acts 2)).

Our stories are told in all sorts of ways - in words, absolutely, but also in our actions and our attitudes, in the choices we make and the lives we live.

Sometimes we re-enact part of the story - like we do here around the table - re-connecting with a part of the story, an experience, that has particular meaning for us.

It is in telling our stories that others are invited into our own experience.

In telling our stories of fear and grief at the destruction of our homes and possessions that we invite people to offer assistance.

In telling our stories of fear and grief and of joy and hope, we invite people into an experience of the love and grace of God.

Just as the disciples were witnesses of that first Easter and the gospel writers each recorded a different perspective, we too are witnesses to the love and grace of the risen Christ in the world today, each of us from our own experiences and perspectives.

And I wonder, just as we are able to tell of our experience of the rain a week or so ago, if I were to ask you to tell of your experience of the risen Christ, how would you tell your story?

How *will* you tell your story, because, after all, “you are witnesses to these things.”

O God,
we are frail human beings,
we long for tactile contact with others.
We need to know
the touch of a hand,
the embrace of a hug,
the gentle kiss on a cheek.

Lord Jesus, seeing you and touching you
were of vital importance to those men and women who were witness
to your resurrection.

Oh that we had been present when you appeared to
the men and women you had called.

Oh that we had heard your words of peace,
your gesture of open arms.

Lord Jesus, even though we were not present then,
we know now you are here,
you are alive and in us and around us always.
May we learn how to tell of our experiences of your love and grace
and may we help others to see you,
to feel you by our words and actions, now and always. Amen.

Responding

Prayer for Others

Creator God,
we thank you for the miracle of your creation.
We thank you for the sun that rises and sets,
the plants that keep the air in balance and provides us food,
the water that moves through the atmosphere,
and the animals and creatures that live on the earth.
Help us to remember the creator each time we encounter the creation.

Loving God,
we thank you for the miracle of life.
We thank you for the way our bodies are made,
the way limbs move,
the way brains think,
the way emotions feel,
and the way you give energy.
We thank you for doctors and nurses who care for us when we are ailing.
We thank you for medicine to treat disease.
Help us to remember your loving goodness that is seen in our bodies.
And we remember before you people who are struggling with injury, illness, ageing bodies,
difficult diagnoses.

Gracious God,
we thank you for the miracle of love.
We thank you for those who love us and those we love.
We thank you for communities of care,
and groups where we can share our interests.
We thank you for social media and other places where we can connect with others.
Help us to remember to love those who might feel out of place and unconnected.
We remember, especially, people who are impacted by war or violence - in their homes, in
the streets, between nations.
We give thanks for the peacemakers and all those who place themselves in dangerous
situations to bring aid and relief to those who suffer. Protect them, we pray.

God of all goodness,
help us to see the miracles around us every day.
Help us to know that you are the author of all that is miraculous.
Amen.

Sharing peace

The peace of Christ be with you all
And also with you.

Sing - Among Us And Before Us (Iona)

*As Jesus stood among his disciples, so we ask Jesus to be amongst us now as we share
around the table...*

Among us and before us, Lord, you stand
with arms outstretched and bread and wine at
hand.

Confronting those unworthy of a crumb,
you ask that to your table we should come.

Who dare say No, when such is your resolve
our worst to witness, suffer and absolve,
our best to raise in lives by God forgiven,
our souls to fill on earth with food from
heaven?

Who dare say No, when such is your intent
to love the selves we famish and resent,

to cradle our uncertainties and fear,
to kindle hope and you in faith draw near?

Who dare say No, when such is your request
that each around your table should be guest,
that here the ancient word should live as new
"Take, eat and drink - all this is meant for
you."?

No more we hesitate and wonder why;
no more we stand indifferent, scared or shy.
Your invitation leads us to say Yes,
to meet you where you nourish, heal and
bless.

Words: John Bell and Graham Maule

Holy Communion

*If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please
let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your
home at a time that suits you.*

Offering

This part of our service is not about the money.

*It is about considering how we will respond to what we have seen and heard and
experienced this morning, or perhaps throughout the week - how is God prompting you,
nudging you, inspiring you - and what will you do about it?*

Each one of us is precious.

Each one of us has something to offer in terms of resources - time, energy, skills, money.

How will you respond?

Jesus,

you gave all you had: your time, your money, your talents and, finally, your life.

We owe you everything.

Accept our offerings of money today; may they remind us of all that we offer you, our whole selves, in your service, today and always. Amen.

Sending

Sing - Go Now In Peace (Seasons 1-11)

We sing a song that sends us into the week as bearers of God's peace...

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.

Peace in your heart, peace in all your thoughts. *(repeat)*

Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.

Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.

Peace in your heart, peace in all your thoughts. *(repeat)*

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.

Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.

Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.

Go now in peace.

Go now in peace.

Words and music: Monica Brown

Sending and Blessing

Go from here, in hope and in joy.

Go from here,

knowing that through the resurrection,

you are loved and free

and you are equipped for all that God calls you to.

Go from here in peace, to bear witness to the love and grace you have seen and experienced.

And the blessing of God - Divine Mystery, Divine Word, Divine Presence -
is with you - always. Amen.

Liturgy drawn from:

Michelle Eastwood , L3, Mediacom, resources for Easter 3, Sunday 14 April 2024

Spill The Beans, Issue 38, Resources for Lent-Easter 2021

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Lent-Easter 2021

Rev Kath Merrifield

14 April 2024