



Opening Responses for Eastertide

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

What comes into mind when you think about the Holy Spirit and how easy or hard do you find it to picture her?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

Glory to you, O God:
your raised Jesus from the grave,
bringing us victory over death and giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, O Christ:
for us and for our salvation you overcame death,
and opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit:
you lead us into the truth, show us the way,
and breathe new life into us.

**Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and forever. Amen**

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 66:8 – 20

Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard,
who has kept us among the living,
and has not let our feet slip.

**For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.**

You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;
you let people ride over our heads;
**we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**

I will come into your house with burnt-offerings;
I will pay you my vows, those that my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

**I will offer to you burnt-offerings of fatlings,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.**

Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for me.

I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.

**But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.**
**Blessed be God because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead,
opening the way to everlasting life,
both in the here-and-now, and throughout all that is to come.
Let us therefore bring to God those things in need of renewal:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:

Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:

Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:

Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:

Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:

Restore us and heal us.

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of new beginnings,
of love stronger than even death,
you set us free from the past, to flourish in the future.
Thank you that you forgive us, restore us,
and breathe new life into us. **Amen**

Reading John 14:15 – 21

Sermon

I spent two years in full-time training to become a Methodist minister and over that time, we covered a wide range of topics, though much of what I have encountered in my work thus far was not included in

the curriculum. Perhaps there needs to be a module on boiler repair and dealing with leaky flat roofs! One subject we did consider is the Doctrine of the Trinity and, in particular, the importance for Christian theology of the Holy Spirit. We learnt that the Spirit has been treated as the poor cousin of the Father and Son for a long time in the West, and that this was only really addressed in the twentieth century. Two other people called Karl – in this case, Barth and Rahner – were the key figures in the movement to rediscover and develop a Trinitarian approach to theology and thus to take the Spirit seriously. However, there is still much to be done to properly redress the balance and to put things right. Today's passage has the potential to make a useful contribution to this effort.

Jesus was having a final conversation with his friends, including but not limited to the Eleven left after Judas had gone out into the night, in order to betray him (John 13:30). Having dealt with some anxious questioning from Peter, Thomas and Philip (13:36 – 14:14), he drew them back to the heart of what he wanted to talk about, having given them a “new commandment” to love one another as he'd loved them (13:31 – 35). In particular, he promised that he would ask the Father to send another Paraclete to be with them forever (14:16). This term 'Paraclete' is somewhat unusual and is difficult to translate because it holds a range of meanings. Hence, if you look at a range of biblical translations, you will find this translated as Advocate and Comforter, as Counsellor and Helper, and it is quite likely that the Gospel writer intended all of them to come to mind as they used a word appearing only five times in the New Testament – four of them in this Gospel.

This short sentence contains a great deal of truths about the life and love of God. Firstly, notice that Jesus spoke of God sending *another* Paraclete, which reminds us that he himself was the first, and hence there is a degree of continuity, even as the disciples' relationship to him would inevitably take a different form following his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Both Christ and the Spirit deal

in truth (14:17a), the truth of love which persists even beyond death. Secondly, Jesus told his disciples that he would speak to the Father, reminding them in the process of his being the eternal Word present in creation and embodied in his person (1:1 – 14). Thirdly and lastly, the Holy Spirit would enable their relationship with him to transcend death, by dwelling with them forever. Wherever they might go in the future, their connection with Jesus wouldn't be limited by physicality but would remain with them so that instead of being abandoned and left as orphans stumbling around in the dark (14:18), they would live precisely because he lives (14:19). Eternal life is therefore just that; life that begins in the here-and-now and never ends, opening up an everlasting relationship with God-in-Christ through the Spirit.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing of all perhaps can get a little lost in the repetition, but the language of 'abiding in' and 'being in' Jesus, which runs throughout what has come to be known as the 'Farewell Discourse', illuminates what eternal life is like. While we're called to follow Jesus' teaching and example in how we live, we're not merely to imitate him in some kind of slavish unthinking obedience. Instead, in keeping the one and only commandment found in John's Gospel, and loving one another as Christ has loved us, we participate in the love flowing between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are drawn into the very life of the Trinitarian God. In Rublev's picture (see below) of the Trinity, there is room for us at the table around which Father, Son and Spirit sit to share bread and wine, in an eternal Communion of unending divine love. John 14:15 – 21 is a verbal description of the same imagery, so that to love one another after Jesus' example is to inhabit the life of God in the here-and-now, in a deep and profound way. Eastern Orthodox Christians have long spoken about *theosis*, unity with God, and John Wesley's thought was also influenced by the same idea.

Weaving these various threads together reveals how, despite being neglected for so long, the Holy Spirit – breathed onto his friends by

the Risen Christ, in 20:19 – 23 – is the One who enables us to enjoy life in all its fullness as an eternal reality, and as an intimate relation between ourselves and the very heart of God. She is always present with us, whether we are celebrating the mystery of Holy Communion or dealing with mundane and everyday stuff like broken boilers and leaky flat roofs! We enter into a divine life when we love one another as God has loved us, bringing together the great commandments in the Synoptic Gospels to love God with all we have and to love other people as ourselves. What this looks like in practice isn't always an easy thing to work out, which is why we need the rest of the teaching and example of Jesus, but it always comes down to love. For all this love and life broken open to us in Christ, thanks be to God! Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

Paula Gooder's work *The Risen Existence* (2015) explores the story of Easter and what it means to follow the risen Jesus.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord's Prayer

Final Prayer – Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us
he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Blessing

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

May the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
fill us with resurrection hope,
and remain upon us and all whom we love and pray for,
now and throughout eternity. **Amen**

Rublev's Ikon of the Trinity – 'The Hospitality of Abraham'

