



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

Think of a time when you helped another person, in a practical way.
What did you do, and how did this experience change you?

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 148 (StF 838)

Praise the Lord!

**Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!**

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!
Praise him, sun and moon, and all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for he commanded and they were created.

He established them for ever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,

creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike, old and young together!
**Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name
alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.**

He has raised up a horn for his people,
**praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel
who are close to him. Praise the Lord!**

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 13:31 – 35

Sermon

'Love one another as I have loved you'. This was the commandment that Jesus gave to his friends during his final conversation with them before his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He had just washed their feet,

in a highly practical demonstration of servanthood (John 13:1 – 20), and sent Judas out to do his dirty work of betrayal (13:21 – 30). Now that this was done, he began to teach his disciples at length, in what has become known as John's *Farewell Discourse*. Having reminded them that he was shortly to go to the cross and hence to be glorified, Jesus gave them their commandment to love one another, following the model and pattern he himself had embodied, and told them that mutual love would become the marker of discipleship in the eyes of the wider world (13:31 – 35). There's a beautiful simplicity about this commandment, which captures in a single sentence the essence of what it is to be a follower of Jesus. However, on closer examination, the issue is rather more complicated. A few years ago, during a bus journey into town, I overheard a woman complaining that her parish priest had spoken in his sermon about needing to love one another. She felt that this was unrealistic when thinking about people outside of her immediate family, revealing one of several pitfalls we need to avoid as we read this text. Jesus was not talking about how we *feel* towards others in the way we typically mean when we speak of love, but about practical care for one another.

It is sometimes argued that as there are three different Greek words for love – *eros*, *philos* and *agape* – there must be a hierarchy of love within the New Testament. The first word relates to eroticism and to sexuality, the second to love between friends, and the third to a self-giving and unconditional love such as that of God for human beings.

It is true that many of Jesus' key statements about the way disciples are to treat one another use *agape*, but on several occasions, Jesus also uses *philos* to expand on what he means by this. Moreover, it's not difficult to find examples in the mystical tradition in both Western and Eastern Churches of a union with God being described in terms of *eros*. In short, many scholars now accept that making distinctions between the different Greek words for love is artificial, especially as it seems that Jesus used them interchangeably. This means that as

we grapple with what it means to follow his new commandment, and thus to love another, we are talking about a passionate commitment to the other, which recognises them as a sibling in Christ, and seeks their good without looking to manage or control. What is more, John 3:16 reminds us of God's love for the whole world, so that the scope of this calling applies not just to fellow disciples, but to all which God has made and is making.

One of the things I love about John's Gospel is the way that it shines a light upon Jesus's commitment to justice. The story of his rescuing of the woman caught in adultery (8:1–11) provides just one example of this, as he called out the men who would have happily stoned her to death in their eagerness to catch him out, without stopping to hold the bloke involved here to account as well. Love is not about feeling warm and fuzzy about others, but about practical action that makes a real difference. It might involve, as in this case, defusing the anger of those bent upon violence. It may mean getting involved in political matters and making your voice heard when you hear of things going on around you which fail to reflect the value of all people in the eyes of God. It could mean volunteering with a foodbank, and drawing on your experiences to challenge the people in power. The possibilities are endless, but the ultimate goal is the same – to love one another, just as Christ has loved us.

Now, there is no pretending that this is easy or without cost. Looking back to the woman on the bus, while she misunderstood what loving one another means, she was right about how it does require energy, and takes us far beyond looking out for ourselves and those closest to us in the narrow way we are encouraged to do in an individualistic society. However, as Jesus reminds us, it's the essence of following him by which the world will recognise our discipleship. That's why it is also important to note that while he knew his relationship with his friends would be fundamentally changed following his death, Easter hope reminds us that God's love was not defeated at Calvary. Love,

and not the violence of the Roman rulers or the religious authorities, gets the last word. So it is that the same depth of love Jesus showed for his friends is available to us in prayer and praise, in the Eucharist and in Bible study, in serving others and sharing fellowship. We are loved beyond imagining; may we love others with the same passion.

Recommended Resource of the Week

Rachel Mann's *Love's Mysteries – The Body, Grief, Precariousness and God* (2020) explores what our fragility teaches us about God.

Prayers of Intercession and Lord's Prayer

Final Prayer – Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

Eternal God, whose Son Jesus Christ
is the way, the truth and the life:
grant us to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
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**