



Opening Responses for Eastertide

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

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'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

What does it mean to belong to God the Father, and how would you explain this to someone outside the church?

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 68:1 – 10, 32 – 35

Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered;
let those who hate him flee before him.
**As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;
as wax melts before the fire,
let the wicked perish before God.**
But let the righteous be joyful;
let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy.
Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds.
His name is the Lord – be exultant before him.

Father of orphans and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation.
**God gives the desolate a home to live in;
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious live in a parched land.**
O God, when you went out before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,
**the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.**
Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;
you restored your heritage when it languished;
**your flock found a dwelling in it;
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.**

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;
sing praises to the Lord,
O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;

listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.

Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel;
and whose power is in the skies.

**Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel; he
gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!**

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 17:1 – 11

Sermon

I imagine that most people have a favourite book of the Bible, which they turn towards in good times and bad, for inspiration and comfort. For me, Luke's Gospel is that text, not least because it contains lots of fantastic parables that can be read in various ways, and it speaks into a wide range of situations and emotions as a result. By contrast, my feelings towards John's Gospel are somewhat more ambivalent. One on the one hand, its prologue (1:1 – 14) is simply majestic, and forms one of the foundation stones of Christianity as it reveals Christ as present in creation as the Word of God, and as enfleshed among us as God in human form, God incarnate. On the other hand, having been shaped by sixty years of theological reflection following events described therein, it can take a lot of grappling with and its usage of specific theological terms with differing levels of meaning can make it tricky to understand. Today's passage is a case in point.

If we're going to make at least a degree of sense of this complicated reading, we will first need to step back and take in some background information. One way in which John's Gospel differs from the earlier accounts we have within the New Testament is its understanding of the passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ as forming a unity, rather than a sequence of three discrete events. This goes some of the way to helping us understand the frequent changes of tenses in this passage, which sees Jesus' prayer jump between past, present and future several times. As the three dimensions of the glorification of Christ come together to make a whole, there is a certain 'narrative freedom' at work. In the second half of John's Gospel, which covers chapters thirteen to twenty-one, glory is a key word. It points toward the climax of Jesus's ministry as he is nailed to the cross, embracing

our broken world in love and proclaiming, “it is finished” (19:30). The glorifying of the Father by the Son, and the Son by the Father (17:1), is about knowing them both, in the sense of an intimate relationship based on divine love, and the repeated mention of ‘the hour’ having come reminds us that God is firmly in charge of how this plays out.

So, with this background material under our belts, we can (perhaps) begin to get a bit closer to understanding what is going on in today’s reading. Essentially, this prayer of Jesus (which forms part of a final and protracted conversation with his disciples) is an invitation to his friends, flawed human beings as they were and as we too are today, to participate in the life of God. In particular, the amazing thing here is that we can enter into the pattern of giving and receiving between the Father and the Son, something made possible only because the passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ paves the way for the Holy Spirit to come (14:15 – 21). In other words, we can join in God’s loving nature when we love one another as Christ has loved us, and we can thus bring glory to God.

This part of Jesus’s prayer, which runs throughout John 17, reaches its zenith with his asking for protection for the disciples and that they may be one, as he and the Father are one (17:11). To my mind, this was always somewhat ambitious given the diversity of those people called to follow him, ranging from zealots who sought the overthrow of Roman imperialism, to tax collectors who collaborated with them, but it has always been part of the Church’s calling to be one. Indeed, the Creeds speak of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic: united in the love of God, holy as God is holy, universal in its outlook and seeking to witness to Christ’s resurrection. To participate in the life of God is not to claim God’s love as a private possession to keep to ourselves, but instead to share that love with others so that those things that divide us might be overcome, and unity, justice and hope prevail. In short, we are to proclaim the refreshment of living waters, life-giving and bubbling up with new possibilities, to the world which

God loves so much that God’s Son was sent to bring us eternal life. Thus, as we prepare for Pentecost, and the whirlwind coming of the Holy Spirit, may we be both grounded in the knowledge and love of God, and open to building bridges across those divides of our times, so that we may truly be one. Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

John Pritchard’s 2010 book *Living Jesus* explores what it means to connect with the historical and living Jesus in today’s world.

Prayers of Intercession and Lord’s Prayer

Final Prayer – Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

Eternal God,
you have given all authority in heaven
and on earth to your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Grant that we may never lose the vision of your kingdom
but serve you with hope and joy;
through him who lives 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**