



### 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 where you have encountered God in an unexpected situation. What happened, and what difference did it make to 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**

**Suggested Hymn – Break thou the bread of life ([StF 513](#))**

### 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**

### **Sermon**

“We had hoped he was going to be the one to *finally* redeem Israel”. You can almost feel the heaviness of these gloomy words, weighed down with disappointments, unmet expectations and despondency. The two men trudged along the seven-mile road, back to their home village of Emmaus, leaving behind the friends who’d decided to stay in Jerusalem. A few days previously, the man they’d followed for the past three years, who embodied the love of God for them, had been brutally executed at the hands of the Roman authorities. Like many, they had hoped he would bring to an end the seven centuries of hurt Israel had endured since the reign of David, when they had been a great and powerful people. They had subsequently been divided up into two nations, carried off into exile in Babylon, persecuted by the Persians and lately occupied by the Romans. Successive rebellions and false messiahs had come along, but Jesus had given them real hope that things were changing, at last. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God, who talked about God’s rule breaking in through him. But all that was over now; Jesus was dead.

And yet, strange things were happening. That same morning, some of the women from the group said they had seen angels proclaiming that Jesus was alive, and still others had found his tomb empty. The men needed time and space to make sense of it all – room to ‘thrash it out’ between the two of them, and figure out what was really going on. So, they had headed home, back to what was familiar and stable and safe, to take stock of life. And that’s when they met this stranger on the road, who just invited himself to join in their discussions, and inquired about what they were puzzling over. The disciples couldn’t believe it – where had this stranger been for the last few days? How could he not know what was on everybody’s lips? They shared with him the story of Jesus and their feelings of doubt, despondency and

dejection. We’d hoped he was going to be the one to redeem Israel, they lamented.

Imagine their surprise, then, at being told *they* were the people who were slow on the uptake, and that the key to understanding what all of this was about was right there in their own sacred scriptures, with Moses and the Prophets. By the time they arrived home, their hearts were on fire, as this stranger unpacked for them the history of God’s love at work in their people’s story. How had they been so blind that they hadn’t seen this before?

As it was nearly evening and getting dark, the men decided to invite the stranger, who’d been about to carry on walking, into their house and to share a meal with them. As they sat around the kitchen table, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. At that moment, in actions that were so familiar from the times they’d spent with Jesus around dinner tables, eating with outcasts and outsiders and marginalised people, they finally recognised him. In that instant, they realised that the women who had told them Jesus is risen, and the men who’d later found the tomb empty, had been telling the truth all along. Thus, despite the late hour and their tired feet, they hurried back towards Jerusalem, to share these incredible events with their friends. As they spoke of Jesus’s appearance in the breaking of the bread, he came and stood amongst the disciples, and declared that his peace was with them.

There is so much one could say about this passage, and the impact it had on the life of the early Church. It proclaims loud and clear that the risen Christ is alive, and present to us today whenever we share in the breaking of the bread. It also reminds us that reading the Bible is important because when we engage with the Scriptures in all their complexity and variety, the Spirit works to set our hearts on fire with God’s love, so that we might each recognise the risen Christ and be changed. Moreover, it is through the nourishment we can find in the

words of God in the Bible, and the Word of God in Holy Communion, that we are equipped by God to step out into the world and proclaim the good news of God's amazing love. Putting this another way, the core of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, as the first fruits of the divine resurrection and new creation, is a challenging and exciting calling. We are to bring that resurrection hope to bear, and keep the rumour of God alive, so the world may know that love *will* have the last word on all things, even in the midst of dark and troubled times.

Rowan Williams just happened to be at a church gathering a couple of blocks away from the World Trade Centre back in September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. In his book *Writing in the Dust*, he contrasts the last words of some of the passengers on the planes to their loved ones with those apparently given by one of the terrorists as 'spiritual advice'. Rowan writes, "Those religious words are, in the cold light of day, the words that murderers are saying to themselves to make a 'martyr's dream' out of a crime. By contrast, the non-religious words form a testimony to what religious language is supposed to be all about – the triumph of pointless, gratuitous love, the affirming of faithfulness, even when there's nothing to be done or salvaged". Resurrection hope is, at its heart, about the persistence of Love when all seems lost, pointless, empty. Hence, it is really in the silence of Golgotha, on Good Friday, and in the utter shock of the women who first found the empty tomb, that our faith gets its integrity and purpose. It is here that the fullness of the pointless, gratuitous love of God's truly laid bare for all to see, and this self-same love speaks powerfully into our current situations of widespread hardship at home and turbulence on the world stage.

A question I am sometimes asked is why does God let terrible things happen, such as human cruelties or natural disasters, and it is never easy to know what to say. Despite the reams of theological literature on the 'problem of suffering', I am not convinced there is a neat and ready answer to be had, and I do not think anyone *can* convincingly explain why God does not always intervene in those ways we might

hope and long for. However, I *do know* that God uses fallible human beings, like you and me, to keep the rumour of God alive by showing the same love we find in the events of the first Easter – a love which just goes on being there even, and perhaps especially, when there's nothing to be done or salvaged. Right at the centre of my ordination vows is God's calling to set people's hearts on fire, and enable them to recognise the risen Jesus, but this isn't the job of ministers alone. The Church is tasked with keeping the rumour of God alive, in times of joy and despair alike, *exactly because* it is the Body of Christ and the visible sign of God's love and faithfulness.

I wonder how you react to being entrusted by God with this mission? Right now, you may feel like the two disciples on the Emmaus Road: dismayed by your own expectations of God not having been met or despondent about your future. However, the Road to Emmaus story shows that Christ really is risen, and this is a reliable basis for hope. From this foundation, God calls us to set people's hearts on fire with the irrepressible love of God, a love that persists even when there's nothing to be done or salvaged. The unexpected encounter with the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread showed those disciples that love – not despair or hate, or even death – really does have the last word. In a world that desperately needs to know this reality, may we too have the courage to share this good news, in whatever ways we can at the moment, because Love Wins – always. Amen

### **Recommended Resource of the Week**

*Grief on the Road to Emmaus* by Beth Hewitt (2023) discusses how to walk alongside grieving people using Benedictine principles.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world".

We pray for those enduring the darkness and despair of war, and all who work for peace across our broken world.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life".

We pray for those in need of nourishment and sustenance,  
and all who struggle to believe they are worth nourishing.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life".

We pray for those in positions of power and authority,  
and all who seek justice for themselves and others.

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd".

We pray for those who feel lost, isolated or abandoned,  
and all who use their time and talents to reach out to others.

Jesus said, "I am the true vine".

We pray for those who feel God absent or distant from them,  
and all who are desperate to abide in the love of God.

Jesus said, "I am the gate of the sheepfold".

We pray for those who share the good news of God's love,  
and all who enable churches to be places of warm welcome.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life".

We pray for those who are bereaved or struggling with loss,  
and all who are unwell in body, mind or spirit.

In a time of quiet reflection,  
we now bring to God our prayers for those on our hearts,  
and for our own needs at this time...

## Lord's Prayer

## Final Prayer – Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter

Risen Christ,  
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:  
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life,  
and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father. **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**