



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 is your earliest memory of resurrection being real for you, and what difference did this make to your life?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

You're invited to take a few moments to give thanks for signs of new life and hope. Afterwards, the following prayer may be offered:

God of resurrection hope and new life,
we bring to you our thanks and praises. **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 Luke 24:1 – 12

Sermon

I wonder if the women who had ventured out early in the morning to embalm Jesus's entombed body – who we are told remained faithful to him throughout his arrest, trial and execution – thought the events of the first Easter seemed like a cruel joke; after everything they had been through in the past couple of days, the last thing they expected as they went to perform this final gesture of kindness for Jesus was to find the stone rolled away, and someone telling them he had been

raised up by God from the dead. I imagine that there is a degree of understatement here when we learn that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and at least two other unnamed women were perplexed upon encountering this strange sight (Luke 24:4) at the tomb into which they had seen Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus just before the Sabbath began (23:55). Research into bereavement reveals our brains protect themselves in the immediate aftermath of a death by almost shutting down, meaning that events seem unreal, and we might well feel numb. Thus, it is little wonder that the women were terrified, and dared not look up at the two dazzling figures who reminded them of Jesus's teaching about his death and resurrection (24:5 – 7). Yet, despite their fears, having recalled what he had said, they once again remained faithful and went back to the others to tell them what they had seen (24:8 – 9).

From the accounts in all four Gospels – which acknowledge that the women were the first to discover the stone rolled away and the tomb standing empty – their witness was not believed. Perhaps this is not surprising when we recall that women were not allowed to offer their testimonies in law courts at that time because they were considered not to be reliable witnesses. However, given the lessons which have emerged in recent years from multiple abuse scandals and from the #MeToo movement, we arguably do not have much room to criticise the male disciples, who dismissed claims about the empty tomb and angelic messengers as ‘idle talk’ (24:10 – 11). Moreover, Matthew’s Gospel documents how the Jerusalem religious establishment were so worried about false rumours of resurrection that they sought help from the Roman authorities, to post some soldiers outside the tomb (Matthew 27:62 – 66). Yet, for all the scepticism of the disciples and unfounded fears of the Pharisees, Jesus was not to be found in the burial grounds a little outside of Jerusalem not because his disciples had moved the body, but because God actually had raised him from the dead. The unbelievable was, in fact, the truth. Thus, the women

were the first apostles and the earliest witnesses to the resurrection. Furthermore, and unlike Peter (whom Luke tells us went home, after seeing for himself, in 24:12), they did spread the word of new life.

However, remarkable as these events were, more was still to come. In the seven weeks of this Easter season, we’ll also learn about the various encounters his disciples had after the resurrection with their risen Lord. The combination of these accounts and that empty tomb points to God’s doing something radically new, not straightforwardly found within Jewish tradition, that not only changed things for those first disciples, but transformed the destiny of the world for all of time. God’s new creation was breaking in, and things would never be the same again. Moreover, those encounters show that the resurrection body of Jesus was not some kind of ghostly form, but truly physical, if different to ‘matter’ as we now know it. Thus, the Creeds talk about ‘the resurrection of the body’, not disembodied souls floating on the clouds and eating Philadelphia! God doesn’t reject the ordinary stuff of life, but instead transforms and redeems it. Also, by continuing to bear crucifixion scars, Christ affirms this continuity between old and new; in other words, he illustrates that matter really does matter!

So, as we celebrate Easter joy, and the new realities made possible because of living, loving, dying and rising of Jesus Christ, God calls us to embrace this fresh release of creative energy into the universe termed a ‘second Big Bang’ by Rowan Williams. Resurrection gives us a promise and guarantee that love really does win out, and death and suffering and evil and brutality will not have the last word. Given the conflict raging in Ukraine right now, as well as the terrible hunger in countries ranging from Afghanistan to Ethiopia, and a deepening climate crisis, Easter hope is much needed. Yet, we all need to keep in mind that resurrection hope is as much about God’s commitments to the world as it is right now as it is about life in God’s new creation. Easter is not about escapism or otherworldliness, but shoots of new life breaking through the unpromising soil of the present messy and

fractured world. It is good to take time to rejoice and celebrate those remarkable events described by Luke in today's reading, but Easter is the catalyst of world-changing transformation. And so, we pray:

God of resurrection hope,
pour your new life into our hearts and fire our imaginations,
so that as we celebrate the remarkable events of Easter,
we might embrace transformation in Christ,
and be empowered by the Holy Spirit
to be agents of change, hope and renewal.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,
our risen Lord and Saviour.

Amen

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**

Prayers of Intercession and Lord's Prayer

Final Prayer – Collect for Easter Sunday

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;
to whom with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit
be praise and glory, honour and might,
now and in all eternity. **Amen**

Closing Sequence and Blessing

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