



Opening Responses for Eastertide

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

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'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Think of a time when you felt too bogged down to move forward with something in your life. What did you do to get back on track?

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 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us,
and make his face to shine upon us,
**that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.**

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
**for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.**

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.

**May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him.**

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 5:1 – 9

Sermon

When I was eighteen, I moved down to Bath to go to university there and fulfil my ambition to work towards doing scientific research. Like lots of new arrivals, I decided to go and do some of the things aimed at tourists to help me get to know the place. One of the most famous attractions is the Roman Baths, where one may enjoy a free sample of water from the hot springs. Back in Georgian times, poor people used to come to Bath to 'take the waters', because they thought that if they drank the spring water, it would cure them of all their ailments and restore them to full health. From personal experience, the water does not actually taste that nice, and apart from being a little cleaner than most water sources in that period, it is not very special – I doubt

many people were cured by drinking from the hot springs. However, thinking about Bath is very useful, because it helps us to understand what was going on in today's passage from John's Gospel.

Jesus and his friends were heading up to Jerusalem, for the second documented time in this Gospel. The first had seen him overturning the tables of the moneylenders and traders in the Temple courtyard, rendering him immediately at odds with the religious establishment, yet etching a powerful memory onto his disciples' minds (2:13 – 22). On this journey, again undertaken to allow them to attend a religious festival, Jesus and company stopped off at a spot called Bethzatha, which is by the Sheep Gate (5:2). As the name suggests, it was the gate used by shepherds and their sheep, meaning that it was out of the way rather than at the heart of the action. Many would gather in the five porticos round the pool of water, because they believed the waters had healing powers; they thought that an angel of God would come and stir up the waters every so often, and the first one to enter it would be healed of whatever was troubling them (5:4). Now, whilst it is of course true that the waters in the pool at Bethesda could not make someone better anymore than the spring waters in Bath could or can, these were desperate people and the myth gave them hope. Jesus spotted a man sat by this pool who had been unwell for thirty-eight years; that's as long as I have been alive! He asked him a very important question – 'do you want to be made well?' (5:6) – but this man told Jesus that he could not be healed, because he had nobody to help him into the water and someone else always beat him to it.

Having to wait for so many years must have been really hard for the man, and so I wonder how he felt when Jesus came and asked him if he wanted to be made well. One imagines that he expected Jesus to wait until the waters were stirred again before lowering him down into the pool, but of course that would not have actually helped him. Instead, Jesus told the unnamed man to stand, pick up his mat and go, which is indeed what happened. Now, it is important to note that

Jesus did not offer to help this person because he was the quickest, or the cleverest, or the most enthusiastic of the folk gathered around by the pool; we make a serious theological mistake if we think God's level of care for us is a function of our enthusiasm, or even the depth of our faith. However, by checking whether this man had wanted to be helped in the first place, Jesus also reminds us that we shouldn't take this for granted – sometimes, the answer may be 'no', and that can be tough for us to hear.

One Friday night, I joined the Street Pastors team in Kingston Town Centre and met some of the homeless folk who have made a choice not to engage with support organisations, and who instead prefer to be on the streets. I remember thinking that, if I ever found myself in a similar situation, I would do whatever it took to get out of that place and have a roof over my head again. Yet, speaking to some of those guys made it very obvious that this really would not be right for them at the moment. It reminded me that one cannot simply impose what we reckon is the 'right thing' upon others, however well-meaning we are. Yet, we can always treat them with kindness, care and respect, especially those who would never win in a 'race to the top'. Reading a little further on in this chapter shows that the act of kindness Jesus performed for the man made his life harder for a while, but it doesn't mean it was the wrong thing to do. Hence, as we reflect further upon this story of new life in an unlikely place, let us pray that we will have the courage to follow his example. Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

David Wilkinson's 2015 *When I Pray, What Does God Do?* explores God's action in tough times.

Prayers of Intercession

You are invited to drop some pebbles or stones into water while you pray for refreshment and renewal for others.

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**