



Opening Responses for Eastertide

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

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'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 are invited to bring your thanksgivings to God in a time of quiet reflection, or using your favourite Easter hymn. The following prayer may be used:

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 Matthew 28:1 – 10

Sermon

It's hard to overstate how dramatic, unexpected and world-changing the events described in our Gospel passage for today were and are, not just for the two Marys who discovered the empty tomb and were told that Jesus has been raised by God from the dead, but for all of us, As Melinda Quivik puts it in her insightful commentary, they were the first people to witness to how "light splits a crack in our universe,

and everything we thought we knew is changed". Having journeyed with Jesus from Galilee up to Jerusalem and supported his ministry, they watched Joseph of Arimathea lay out his body, in a fresh tomb, shortly before the beginning of the Sabbath, and returned when that was over to keep vigil. Perhaps they had come back to anoint Jesus ready for the year which Jewish customs dictated he should remain there, before then being moved to his final resting place and buried. They had no idea they would become the earliest apostles.

There are common features present in all four accounts we have of that first Easter morning, including the fact that though women could not give testimony in court at the time, the resurrection of Jesus was initially witnessed by female disciples, and it was they who were first to testify that Christ is risen and the tomb stands empty – not any of the men who also followed Jesus, but all fled when he was arrested. However, as every Gospel reflects a different oral tradition and faith community, we shouldn't be surprised that each puts their particular slant upon events. Matthew's account is full of unique details, which includes the precise identities of the women – Mary Magdalene and 'the other' Mary, who was probably Jesus's own mother (see 13:55) – and the presence of a single angelic messenger, together with the shift of the action toward Galilee (28:7, 28:10), treating the disciples as a group rather than focusing on Peter (28:8), and the earthquake as the stone sealing the tomb was rolled away (28:2). The disciples' touching of Jesus's feet (28:9) shows this was no illusion and Jesus' resurrection body was a real physical body even though the sudden earthquake shows how the ground had, literally and metaphorically, moved beneath them all. Nothing would ever be the same.

For the women, the appearance of the angel must have been pretty scary to put it mildly, and indeed we know that the soldiers stationed there by the religious authorities to guard that tomb fainted with fear, appearing as if dead (28:4). In the way that the angel's clothes were dazzling white as Jesus had been when transfigured (17:1 – 9), and

with the sizzling power fraught with danger which made him appear like lightning (28:3), it is little wonder they were afraid. Both fear and vision are central themes in this account, reflected in the multiplicity of mentions in just ten verses, and culminating in the potent mixture of fear and great joy experienced by the Marys as they ran to inform the rest of the disciples that Jesus is risen (28:8). As Quivik reminds us, looking for and yearning, fearing and seeing, are entwined in the presence of the holy. Here lies the paradox of Easter Sunday, which holds together profound joy and awestruck fear. As a preacher, this tension is one I have sometimes struggled with, because being true to the story as told in Mark's Gospel, for example, demands that we do not rush past the latter in our desire to embrace the former, which is not easy to resist when we want to proclaim the good news of the resurrection from the rooftops. Perhaps the fundamental point here is that if we should come to regard the events of Easter as mundane and feel neither joy nor fear, then we have lost something essential.

Rowan Williams once described the resurrection of Jesus Christ as being like a 'second Big Bang', an explosion of fresh creative energy into the universe. Once released, this energy cannot be put back in its box, and thus everything has changed forever. I like this imagery, because it points to the same sizzling power fraught with danger we see in the angelic messenger's lightning-like appearance and to the new possibilities God has unleashed by bringing about the death of death. Easter offers concrete, tangible proof that God's love cannot be defeated, overcome or extinguished, even by the very worst that human beings can throw at it. If it really is true that God raised Jesus from the dead, then that same looking for and yearning, fearing and seeing, of the women on the first Easter morning is still entwined in the presence of the holy, before which we might dare to stand when we proclaim that Christ is risen. So, may we journey onward, in both awe-full fear and profound joy, to shout from the rooftops that Jesus is risen. Alleluia! Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

Rowan Williams' 2016 book *The Sign and the Sacrifice* explores the meaning of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord's Prayer

Final Prayer – Collect for Easter Sunday

Let us pray:

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**

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**