

An End and a Beginning

17 April 2022

Call to Worship Psalm 118

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

When I survey

Isaac Watts

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;
Then I am dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Prayer of adoration and confession

Based on a prayer by Pat Bergen

Gracious God,
Thank you for the gift of today.
Refresh us. Invite us to discover your presence
In each person that we meet
And every event that we encounter.
Teach us when to speak and when to listen
When to ponder and when to share.
In moments of challenge and decision
Attune our hearts to the whisperings of your Wisdom.
As we undertake ordinary and unnoticed tasks,
Gift us with simple joy.
When our day goes well, may we rejoice.
When it grows difficult, surprise us with
New possibilities.

We bring our failures and disasters
Our disappointments and mistakes before you now

Pause

When life is overwhelming, call us to
Sabbath moments
To restore your Peace and Harmony.
May our living today reveal your Goodness.
Amen.

Notices

The Peace

Reading 1 Luke 24:1-12

The Resurrection of Jesus

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were

perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Reflection 1

I wonder if anyone remembers the first time they realised that Santa Claus wasn't really a jolly man dressed in red and white flying around behind a collection of weirdly named reindeer? I know I don't remember that small revelation – it was probably something that simply became clear over time. I do remember the conversations we had with other parents as we debated whether the whole Santa thing was healthy and what to let kids know and not know. We ran the whole range from those who never wanted to tell their kids to those who wanted their kids to grow up knowing fact from fiction. From there the debate moved to what happens when well informed children bring less informed children up to date – as they do.

It has me wondering what sort of conversation God had with Jesus and the Holy Spirit around what happened following that last Passover. Do we let them think it's all over and then jump out from behind a bush and yell, 'Surprise!?' Or do we keep them in on the story from the beginning?

In the end they went with the, 'Keep them informed,' idea. But have you noticed how, with all the information in the world, Jesus disciples still didn't get it? All they could see was that Jesus had died and was buried. End of story. Game over. The fact that Jesus had told them what was going to happen, more than once, seemingly had no impact at all. They were stuck in the loop of only seeing what was in front of them, which to be fair is very much the human condition. That state of being that ignores everything that is not directly related to who and how we are in the moment. I was terrible as a young father looking after the kids. I would get engrossed in something I was doing and just not notice what the kids were getting up to. If they weren't right in front of me

who knew what might be going on. It's an extreme example, but I have seen something similar happening here in Oamaru around Covid. The attitude that I am fine, we are fine, because what I am experiencing here and now is fine. People who if faced with a large Covid virus running down the street toward them would take off in the opposite direction as fast as they can behave as if they are invulnerable because they can't see the virus. We don't have it. Nobody I know has it. I'll be fine. No amount of science and the experience of others helps.

I think this is where the disciples found themselves following Jesus' death. Everything in front of them said that it was over. The end of this great story was here and now. Their grief needed to be dealt with and life, as they used to know it, needed to go on.

It's no wonder they were terrified when they found the tomb was empty and angels standing where his body should have been. And no wonder that the angels' words seemed to be an idle tale.

In Christ alone

Stuart Townend

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day

Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Reading 2 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

¹⁹ If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Reflection 2

Amazed. Amazed at what had happened. But still not comprehending. It took Jesus walking with them, standing among them, showing them his hands and feet and eating with them for them to begin to understand. This beginning of understanding, a dawning of comprehension didn't happen instantaneously. It wasn't some supernatural flash discernment, for all that what was happening was far outside their experience of the natural. It took weeks to begin to piece everything together and make sense of what was happening. In fact, I suspect that it wasn't until Pentecost that things clicked into place and they moved from shock and confusion to understanding and growth.

It is that beginning of understanding that Paul is referring to when he puts forward the idea that Jesus being raised from the dead is a like a first fruit.

That very first apple on the tree, the first potato of the season, the first strawberry of the year – all signs of what is to come. Jesus, risen from the dead, is the beginning.

Easter reminds us in a way that wherever there is an ending, there is always a beginning. It may not be the beginning we were expecting. It may be that the ending leaves us filled with grief and unsure where to turn. It may even be that the ending lays so heavily on us that we find ourselves stuck in the pain, so overwhelmed by what is in front of us that we simply can't see into the world beyond. Or it may be the ending leaves us in such a rush to get back to whatever we long to call normal that we completely miss the possibility of a fresh beginning.

I want to invite you this Easter, to consider the possibility of what new beginnings God may have for you. It may be something obvious. Or it could be something completely unexpected. Whatever it is, look to Jesus, raised from the dead, a first fruit of what is to come. A beginning of hope to follow the ending.

We Pray

God of endings and beginnings, we ask you to broaden and deepen our vision. Help us to see beyond our narrow horizons and into the incredible that you have before us. Teach us to look past our comfortable and into your amazing. Let this Easter be a reminder for each of us, not of what has ended, but what is only beginning. Through our wonderful Lord and Saviour, Jesus. Amen.

Lord, I lift your name

Rick Founds

Lord I lift your name on high
Lord I love to sing your praises
I'm so glad you're in my life
I'm so glad you came to save us

You came from heaven to earth to show the way
From the earth to the cross my debt to pay
From the cross to the grave
From the grave to the sky
Lord I lift your name on high

Offering

Mighty God of Resurrection Power: You offer us life that overcomes death, light that overcomes darkness, hope that overcomes our deepest despair! What response could we offer? Our gifts and offerings, yes; but our minds, hearts, bodies, and witness as well. May our minds be about understanding who you are and who you long for us to be in this world. May our hearts overflow with your love and compassion for the poor, the oppressed, and the forgotten. May our bodies carry us out of the tombs of isolation to engage our neighbours as sisters and brothers. May our witness be the "Alleluias!" we take with us to bring hope to everyone we meet! In the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for ourselves and others

For the refugee crisis

God of all people

you are the source of all goodness, generosity and love.

We thank you for opening the hearts of many

to those who are fleeing for their lives.

Help us now to open our arms in welcome,

and reach out our hands in support.

That the desperate may find new hope,

and lives torn apart be restored.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord,

who fled persecution at His birth

and at His last triumphed over death.

For the cold and homeless

God of compassion,

your love for humanity was revealed in Jesus,

whose earthly life began in the poverty of a stable

and ended in the pain and isolation of the cross:

we hold before you those who are homeless and cold

especially in this bitter weather.

Draw near and comfort them in spirit

and bless those who work to provide them

with shelter, food and friendship.

We ask this through Jesus, who had no place to lay his head.

For the fearful and lonely
God of grace,
You reach out to every one of us
Longing to shelter us as a mother hen shelters her chicks
You wrap us about in your love
And whisper words of hope and care
We hold before you those who are afraid
Those who find themselves alone
Enfold them in your loving arms
Send to them people, maybe us, to encourage and bring hope
We ask this through Jesus, who stood alone in his darkest moment.

All these things we bring before God through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Low in the grave he lay

Robert Lowry

Low in the grave He lay
Jesus my Saviour!
Waiting the coming day
Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Vainly they watch His bed
Jesus, my Saviour!
Vainly they seal the dead
Jesus my Lord!

Death cannot keep his prey
Jesus, my Saviour!
He tore the bars away
Jesus my Lord!

Benediction and Grace

As we go from here may we be a people amazed by the work of Christ in us,
pressing in to the new beginnings laid before us.

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.