

Chirbury Hills Group of Churches

A simple service for the Third Sunday of Easter



Alleluia! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Confession

Let us show our love for our risen Lord by confessing our sins in penitence and faith, and offering ourselves anew in his service.

God of mercy, we acknowledge our sin before you, the wrong we have thought and said and done, and the good things we have failed to do. Forgive and cleanse us, that we may offer ourselves afresh in the service of our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

May almighty God, who sent his Son into the world to save us, grant us his pardon and peace, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Collect for the Day

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.**

Acts, chapter 3, verses 12 to 19 :

Peter saw the people coming and met them with these words: 'Men of Israel, why be surprised at what has happened? Why stare at us as if we had made this man walk by some power or godliness of our own? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has given the highest honour to his servant Jesus, whom you handed over for trial and disowned in Pilate's court - disowned the holy and righteous one when Pilate had decided to release him. You asked for the reprieve of a murderer, and killed the Prince of life. But God raised him from the dead; of that we are witnesses. The name of Jesus, by awakening faith, has given strength to this man whom you see and know, and this faith has made him completely well as you can all see.

'Now, my friends, I know quite well that you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers; but this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets: that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, therefore, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, and then the Lord may grant you a time of recovery.'

Luke, chapter 24, verses 36 to 48 :-

As the disciples were talking about all that had happened, there was Jesus, standing among them. Startled and terrified, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so perturbed? Why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; no ghost has flesh and bones as you can see that I have.' They were still incredulous, still astounded, for it seemed too good to be true. So he asked them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They offered him a piece of fish they had cooked, which he took and ate before their eyes.

And he said to them, 'This is what I meant by saying, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms was bound to be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. 'So you see', he said, 'that scripture foretells the sufferings of the Messiah and his rising from the dead on the third day, and declares that in his name repentance bringing the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are to be witnesses to it all. I am sending on you the gift promised by my Father; wait here in this city until you are armed with power from above.'

Thanks be to God, for this his holy word. **Amen.**

A Reflection on the Reading

"Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out." Those were Peter's words in our first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles. Having healed a crippled beggar at the temple gate, Peter finds a crowd had gathered round, amazed to see a man who'd been begging in the same place for years up and about, walking on his own and praising God.

So Peter takes his chance to preach to the people, assuring them that it's not by any power of his own that the man's been healed, but in the name of Jesus. He pulls no punches - it's your fault he died, he tells them. And yet it was also God's plan that the Messiah should have suffered and died. It's what the prophets had said would happen. So, he tells them, repent, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.

Most church services include a prayer of confession, usually early on in the service. I'm fairly conscious of sin in my own life, but when I talk to people about Christ having lifted from us the burden of our sin, I think I'm often not really understood. Usually because the person I'm talking to isn't really aware of any burden of sin.

“I’m glad the church is there for me when I need it,” I recall someone saying to me in the pub after choir practice. “But to be honest, I don’t seem to need it all that much.” I think he spoke for quite a lot of people who find themselves to be in a fairly comfortable place. They’re doing their best to be nice and kind, and certainly not to cause trouble or harm, and though they wouldn’t claim to be perfect, they’re sure they’re not doing anything that’s really bad.

Well, I’m also doing my best to be nice and kind, and I don’t think I do anything that’s horribly bad; yet personally I’m still aware of sin as a burden in my own life. There are three areas of my life where this hits me: firstly there’s just the fact that I know I’m not the best version of myself. I could and should do better, and as a Franciscan I have a rule of life that measures the extent to which I fall short of what I should be aiming at. Secondly, things I do, or more often things I fail to do, or don’t do as well as I should have, can hurt other people, and I hate to think of someone being hurt or sad or just inconvenienced because of me. It’s not deliberate, I’d never set out to hurt anyone - but my negligence, forgetfulness or clumsiness can do damage. And thirdly I’m aware that there are people who have a right to be able to rely on me, and sometimes I don’t carry out my responsibilities as I should.

When I tried to explain that to my friend in the pub, I discovered that none of those things were classified as sin in his mind. Modern secular society, if it thinks of sin at all, tends to think of it in terms of some pretty specific wrong or illegal things - murder, rape, gbh, housebreaking etc, or mean stuff like trolling or racism or verbal abuse. Or of sexual misdemeanours. But hamartia, the Biblical Greek word translated as sin, actually has a sense of missing the mark we should be aiming at, falling short of the target - which as a useless darts player is something I very much understand. And it’s about what we fail to do as much as what we do do.

Heaven is reserved for perfect people, which means that the slightest feather weight of sin’s enough to keep me locked out. Or it would be, except that God loves me - and you, and a load of other folk, many of whom you might think don’t deserve his love. Now as it happens you’d be quite right to think that: the fact is that none of us deserves God’s love. God’s love is fundamentally gracious, by which I mean that it doesn’t depend on our deserving it. The cross and the empty tomb are the signs of an undeserved and unmerited love that wins for us the battle we can’t win ourselves. The man who shows his disciples his scarred and broken hands and feet is the proof of a love that reaches out from Calvary to every part of the world. Sin does matter, even if we can explain it away, or label it as trivial. In fact it’s deadly. But in Jesus God’s promise is carried through. His love wins out over all the bad stuff, and death no longer has the last word.

Statement of Faith -

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love. We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high. We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pray that the Church everywhere may be marked by an active and welcoming faith, that we may patient with out failings, and eager to forgive. Pray for th Anglican province of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. Pray for our own Diocese, for Bishop Richard, for the churches and communities of the Leominster Deanery and for our links with the church in Nuremberg.

Pray for the peace of the world, for every place of conflict and division, and for all who are denied justice, freedom or the opportunity to learn. Give thanks for all who volunteer in various ways that serve and enrich our society, and for aid workers around the world.

Pray for our own communities and for our families and friends. May our faith bear fruit in witness, service and sharing. Give thanks for all who run our community and village halls and the sports facilities that serve our communities.

Pray for all who are ill, in danger or in need today, and for their care, support and encouragement. Today is World Haemophilia Day - pray for all who live with this disease, and other blood complaints.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

*Prayer & Blessing - May the light of Christ, rising in glory, banish all darkness from our hearts and minds. **Amen.***

May God our Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life. And may almighty God bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**